

A CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE
TO ENCOURAGE, EDUCATE, ENGAGE, AND UNITE

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Clarion

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what's inside

In my recent editorial (Vol 73, No 15) I pleaded for more useful press releases and I'm happy to say that both of our recent regional synods—before my editorial was published, to be sure—produced just that, so kudos to each writer/assembly! Very informative. You'll find them toward the end of this present issue along with a letter to the editor and two book reviews. Looking for a reliable Bible story book to read to your children? In a longer review article, John Scott presents a summary of top choices.

In terms of meditational pieces, Carl Van Dam writes about the moving reality that believers are incorporated into the very family of Jesus Christ while Rick Ludwig reflects on our spiritual clothing and posture as Christians. Ilse VanderMeulen brings us another entry in the *Witness at Work* column, this time about a professional plasterer. The rest of the articles deal directly with church matters: Karlo Janssen completes his summary of current Dutch Reformed church life while Jan DeGelder shares an overview of the recent general synod of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand. Eric Kampen meanwhile introduces us to the Protestant Reformed Churches, although some of our readers may be familiar with them already from the past.

May your reading be edifying!

Peter Holtvliuwer

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Clarion

A trustworthy and engaging magazine, widely spread and read in Canadian Reformed households and beyond.

To equip God's people for his glory, in faithfulness to Scripture, as summarized in the Reformed confessions, Clarion adheres to the following core values:

Confessionally Reformed
Loving in manner
Attuned to current issues
Readable and Reliable
In Submission to Scripture
Open to constructive criticism
Nurturing Christian living

6-56-38

Three numbers . . . what do they mean? Our initial answer may depend on familiar contexts where we deal with numbers. A mother out shopping may be thinking of percentages giving nutritional values in a product, although the figures are rather unusual. Someone out at a garden centre may be thinking of ratios in fertilizers. Also here, the ratios are a bit unusual. Someone in the locker room may be thinking of the combination for a lock.

This article, however, comes to readers who have grown up in a Reformed church. In that context, these numbers should ring a bell, because these numbers describe the ratios in the Heidelberg Catechism as it sums up the doctrine of the Word of God. This ratio is worth some reflection.

RATIOS EXPLAINED

Now that the numbers have been linked to the Heidelberg Catechism, those who have grown up with it will almost intuitively know what they stand for, namely, its threefold division of “Guilt—6%, Grace—56%, Gratitude—38%.” You will notice that this adds up to exactly 100%. The Catechism manages to sum up the whole counsel of God concerning our salvation.

As you can see from this spiritual formula, the core consists of the saving work of God in our Lord Jesus Christ. Talk about guilt explains the need for grace. Talking about gratitude after talking about grace makes clear that gratitude is a response, not a condition for grace. It is revealing that while talk of guilt is first, percentage wise, it is by far the leanest of the three. This is not because it is not important. Rather, it is the case that what needs to be said to explain the seriousness of our spiritual situation can be said in relatively few words. In this, the Catechism reflects the way the Bible tells us in less than one chapter about the fall into sin. Throughout the Bible there are reminders of this fall and its effects, but the bulk of the Bible tells us how God has gone about delivering us from all our sins and misery. As the story of grace unfolds, instruction for the life of gratitude is woven around the story of grace. In this way, the Catechism does justice to the fact that all of Scripture points to our salvation out of grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

IMPLICATIONS

This 6-56-38 ratio is good to keep in mind in terms of where we should place the emphasis in our lives as Christians. There has been a tendency over the ages to dwell excessively on our guilt to the point of the morose. To be sure, there are passages in Scripture that bring out the depth of our guilt. We can think of how Paul writes in Romans 3 that no one can do good, not even one, or in Ephesians 2 that we are dead in our sins and trespasses. The Bible, however, does not dwell on this. It dwells on God’s work of salvation through his Son Jesus Christ in all its riches, nuances, and complexities. It shows the depth of his love and his power to overcome sin. To be sure, we can become too light and easy-going about sin, but we can also become too heavy and uptight about sin. The Catechism teaches us to focus on our salvation in Christ. Further, while we can dwell on what we can’t do, the Bible tells us what we should do and how we can begin to apply ourselves to it in the strength of the Holy Spirit.

This also has implications for the preaching in the sense that it reminds ministers to stay balanced as they proclaim the gospel. It is, after all, the gospel, the good news of salvation. While there must be exposing of sin and calling to repentance, preaching is not to be a dwelling on sin, but a dwelling on the Saviour and the implications for a redeemed life. Although the Catechism sets an example for proper balance in preaching, this does not mean that it is a formula for each specific sermon but for the overall balance in the preaching, and ministers do well to aim for this balance in their text choices.

So, keep in mind those numbers 6-56-38 of the Catechism. It is a good ratio to keep in mind in the preaching and in our faith life. It will help sinners stay focused on the Saviour and guide them in how to serve him. 



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FAMILY OF GOD

For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother

– Mark 3:35

Family is an important part of life for us, whether our families are big or small. Our family gives us our identity and we spend most of our time with our family. A strong bond is developed between parents and children and among the brothers and sisters of a household. When one member of the family is in need, the other family members help out. We will do all we can to support each other.

The Lord Jesus also had his own family, his blood relations. By the time of his public ministry, it appears that Joseph has passed away, but Jesus has his mother Mary and his brothers. We read in Mark 3:21 that his family is concerned about Jesus. He has been busy healing many and casting out unclean spirits. There are always large crowds around him. He can't even eat because of it, and that's when his family decides to step in and seize him, saying that he's out of his mind. The scribes from Jerusalem add to this insult by concluding that Jesus got his powers from the evil one. Jesus warns them of the unforgiveable sin of blaspheming against the Holy Spirit.

How does Jesus respond when he hears that his mother and brothers are looking for him? He uses it as an occasion for the gospel! He loves his mother and brothers, but his love for his blood relatives is less important to him than the new family of God he is establishing. Instead of leaving the crowd and going out to his physical family, he welcomes the crowd into the family of God.

Jesus asks, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" (v. 33). And then, looking at all those around him, says, "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother."

Doing God's will is the way to enter this family of God. It means listening to and believing his Word. The will of God is that man should believe in God's Son Jesus Christ and obey and treasure his words. These are the words of life and the only glad tidings in this world. Those who believe the gospel message are those who are brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ.

The Lord Jesus speaks here with authority as the Son of God. Whoever believes in him, he will give the right to become a child of God (John 1:12). We are children of God by adoption and may share the same heavenly Father as Jesus Christ. He is our great

brother who stands alongside us and understands our sufferings and afflictions. He shares completely in our humanity.

We read in Hebrews 2 that because he helps the spiritual offspring of Abraham, "Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted" (Heb 2:17–18). What a great comfort it is, that our great brother Jesus Christ has also experienced temptation and now, from heaven on high, gives us his help to assist us in our hour of need.

As fellow believers in Jesus Christ, together we share the bond of being brothers and sisters. We are all part of the great family of God. He is our heavenly Father and Jesus Christ is our brother. The bond which binds us together is far deeper and longer lasting than the blood bond of physical family relations. It is the bond of the blood of Christ which gives us peace with God and life everlasting with God the Father and Jesus Christ our brother. Let us live together as God's family, rejoice in doing God's will, and experience all the blessings of being part of God's household. 📖

FURTHER READING

John 1:1–18; Romans 8:12–17; Hebrews 2:5–18

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. What does it mean to you that Jesus is your great brother?
2. How are you working with the fact that God is your heavenly Father and that you are his precious child by adoption?
3. How can we strengthen the bond between members of God's family?



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A close-up photograph of a man's torso. He is wearing a white dress shirt, a dark tie, and a dark suit jacket. A wooden measuring tape is wrapped around his chest, and a hand is visible on the right side holding the end of the tape. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be a workshop or tailor's shop.

Posturepedia

RICK LUDWIG

My grandfather was a tailor from a family of tailors. As a young boy, I shared that information with many people with a deep sense of pride. I used to spend afternoons after school or during summer holidays sweeping up the bits and pieces of thread and fabric clippings as he worked in his home office, hunched over his workbench or at his pedal-powered black Singer sewing machine. He would regale me with stories of his youth, always with a gleam in his eye so that I was never sure when he was crossing the line from facts to fancy.

I remember him telling me that at times he would work around the clock with his Dad and brothers to complete large suit orders on a tight timeline for weddings or other important events. In between, they were also busy outfitting the pastor and many of the men in the church and in the business community. As he slowly stood up and tried to straighten after hours of bending, he schooled me on the importance of good posture. *You need to stand up straight with your shoulders back to wear a suit properly!* He shared that he and his brothers would walk around for

hours with a broomstick across their mid-back, tucked under the crooks of their elbows, to help correct their posture after working an all-nighter. I can still picture his serious countenance even while his eyes twinkled simultaneously. About that time, my grandmother would bring in the tea and just shake her head with a slim smile.

SPIRITUAL POSTURE

As I get older, I do think more and more about good posture. Core exercises and a regular trip to the chiropractor are good reminders. But I also contemplate spiritual posture. In the kingdom of heaven, it seems that the lessons on posture are quite different. Our positioning can speak more about our inner being, our comportment, than about our physical well-being. Many times, the Bible teaches us that how we hold or present ourselves is closely linked with our justification! Jesus often depicts the Pharisees standing proudly for all to see as they pray in public or making a spectacle of their piety. They justify themselves. And they receive their reward in the adulation of others. In contrast, there are many examples of the lowly, the bent-over, the crippled or lame, the ones fallen face down, or receding in the background as they reach out for a fringe of Christ, for a glance from the Master, for just a word from his lips. These people are looking to be justified outside of themselves. Their hands are empty. Their faces are downcast. Their hope and worth are not in themselves but in another. They are not exercising to stand up straighter. They are getting as low as they can so that they can be lifted up. Their reward is in heaven. Jesus makes it clear which posture is right for his kingdom.

He also demonstrates it. The Master has very little of his own belongings. He has no place that he can call his own to lay down his head. He is dependent on others. He bends down low to wash his followers' feet in a demonstration of servanthood. He stoops to write or spit in the sand to save the sinner. He sits and takes the little children on his lap. He reclines at the table with the local lesser-thans and those of low repute. He kneels in prayer to his Father in heaven. He rides a lowly donkey on his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. He bows his head and is silent as he bears the rebuke and false insults of his accusers. When he is finally lifted up, it is in shame and dishonour, disrobed, with a crown of thorns on his head, and nailed to a cross. The posture of our Saviour is that of one who bends all the way down to suffer in our place. He descends into hell.

After Christ's resurrection and ascension, and the outpouring of the Spirit, the apostles also begin to correct their posture before the throne of grace. They no longer vie for preferential seating or to be first in line. They begin to teach that only in humility will a



*Jesus makes it
clear which
posture is right
for his kingdom*

believer be lifted up. It becomes increasingly clear to them what it means to take up their cross. It involves bending, and giving, and denying oneself for the sake of others. Mimicking the posture of Jesus in his ministry on earth is the way to love God and our neighbour. More care for the poor, the widow and the orphan, the stranger, the foreigner, and the outcast. Many of the apostles suffer plenty so that the gospel will be shared. They consider it a privilege to be united to Christ in this way. Sacrifices of thanksgiving and humility are the pleasing incense offered by the citizens of heaven.

ROBES OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

Being able to stand up straight and wear a nice new suit is also a privilege and something to be thankful for. But it can never justify. It could possibly even confuse our thoughts about how we stand before the living God. I remember being told not to go on my knees wearing my good Sunday pants! It is not the suit that is the problem though, but the inner posture that could adorn it. A suit worn with pride receives its own reward in the adulation of others. I never did get a suit from my grandfather, which he regretted. By the time I stopped growing, his fingers were no longer nimble enough for the precision needed to cut and sew by hand. There was a shared sadness between us when he looked at his hands and rubbed his fingers together in acknowledgement that they no longer felt like they used to. After that there was nothing to sweep up, even though I still fondly lined up the spools of thread in groups of colour and order of size.

I do have other memories of my grandfather. I remember him sitting a row or two ahead of me in church each week, leaning forward with his ear towards the pulpit as Rev. Stam lavished us with the gospel. It wasn't a twinkle in his eye that I saw then, but a tear. I think back on hearing his humble prayer at mealtimes in a language that I did not understand. I recollect him getting on his knees to say my bedtime prayer with me when I stayed for a sleepover. As dementia set in, I recall he seemed more bent over and vulnerable than I had ever known him. When he died, he was dressed in one of his good suits for his burial. At the cemetery I could feel the weight of him as I strained to walk straight and tall in my best store-bought suit as I helped carry his casket. The epitaph on his gravestone read: *Sown in dishonour, Raised in honour*. The thought crossed my mind, even a tailor will need to be re-clothed.

I will keep working on my posture for Jesus's name's sake. He is a wonderful and gentle Saviour. He is also a skilled tailor, making robes of righteousness for all who see themselves truly as they are and look up to receive his love and grace and the Father's forgiveness. *His robes for mine, O wonderful exchange!* 



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THE DUTCH CHURCH SCAPE

(Part 2)

Editor's note: For an overview of acronyms used in this article, please see the article in the previous issue of Clarion.

PREVIOUSLY

In the previous article we considered the broader Dutch church scape, focusing on the formation of the NeGK in May 2023 and a brief description of the CGK and HHK. In this article we review the merger of the DGK and GKN into a single federation, the GK. That happened in the course of several synods: GKN December 2023, DGK January 2024, and both GKN and DGK October 2024. I was privileged to attend the GKN synod in December 2023 and the extraordinary combined synods in October 2024.

THE GKN

The GKN is a church federation of (at last count) eighteen churches in the Netherlands who came out of the GKv around 2010. They are very much like the CanRC in diversity and practice. In October 2022 they became a member church of the ICRC.

The GKN synod I attended first was constituted on November 4, 2023 to meet every second Saturday. Matters pertaining to interchurch relations—both abroad and domestic—were on the agenda December 2 and 3. The two consecutive days of sittings were to accommodate observers from churches abroad: the CanRC (myself), the FRCA (Dr. Pete Witten), and the OPC (Mr. John Terpstra). Regrettably our South African sister churches (FRCSA) were not able to send a delegate. During synod proceedings, the fraternal delegate could speak freely (though not vote), and observers (like myself) could speak when invited to do so after the final round of debate on a matter.

On December 1, we as observers met with the interchurch relations abroad committees of GKN and DGK. At this meeting we got to know each other and each other's situations. The meeting

was chaired by Rev. A. de Jager, who has served as a minister for the Neerlandia CanRC and was involved in the ICRC in the 1990s. Things went smoothly and professionally. The discussion was frank and fruitful.

On December 2, the three observers from churches abroad addressed the synod. Following these addresses the synod discussed the report of the committee with members of the committee present. The GKN adopted recommendations to seek ecclesiastical fellowship (EF) with the CanRC, FRCA, and FRCSA and to accept the OPC invitation to a corresponding relationship (working towards EF). They also adopted a set of regulations for categories of interchurch relations drawing, among others, on the CRCA-CCCNA report presented to GS-CanRC 2022.

The GKN further decided to continue the relationship with the SERK. The SERK is a federation of two small churches in Germany. The connection between GKN and SERK came through the work of the SERK's seminary, RTS, which was heavily supported by the GKv in the Netherlands. It came onto the GKN radar through the work of the late Dr. J. Douma when he left the GKv and joined the GKN. There is some communication between RTS and our CRTS. It was interesting to learn that not only does the GKN provide the SERK with financial assistance, it also conducts church visitations for the two congregations.

On December 3 the focus was on domestic interchurch relations. Two brothers from the DGK committee for church unity were present in the audience. It was clear from the start that the synod members were unanimous about proceeding towards merging with the DGK. Differences of opinion existed, however, about how to do this.

Further discussions that day focused on relationships with the zGKv (as well as the Taskforce), with the CGK, and with the HHK. Regarding the Taskforce it had been noted with some concern that the Taskforce was facilitating afternoon worship services in locations where the GKv had ceased to hold them but where GKN and/or DGK were already active. It was reported that there had been a meeting of GKN with the Taskforce and that closer cooperation would be sought moving forward. The Taskforce had indicated it would appreciate it if GKN and DGK ministers could help with these second services.

THE DGK

The DGK are a church federation of (at last count) eleven churches in the Netherlands who came out of the GKv around 2003. They are similar to a more traditional CanRC.

The DGK convened their synod on January 13, 2024. I did not attend this synod as that would not have been financially responsible. Moreover, the CanRC had not received an invitation to this synod.

The relationship CanRC-DGK was overshadowed by the existence of the relationship DGK-LRCA. The LRCA-DGK is problematic since the LRCA considers the CanRC a false church. In 2022 the DGK decided to admonish the LRCA for its narrow view on the catholicity of the church and exhort the LRCA to return to the CanRC. On the other hand, a difficulty with the DGK is that there is a faction within it with convictions much like those of the LRCA. It is connected to the website bouwenenbewaren.nl, and, for example, considers the OPC a false church.

On January 20, Synod Dalfsen of the DGK decided unanimously to reciprocate the decision of Synod Kampen of the GKN and declared the DGK to be in state of union with the GKN. During a synod session some months later, the DGK decided to terminate its sister church relationship with the LRCA. With these two decisions, impediments to a sister church relationship between the CanRC and DGK have been removed.

THE MERGER OF 2024

On March 16, 2024, the two synods (of the GKN and DGK) held a combined meeting at which decisions were taken regarding the preparation of the merging of the two federations of churches. These decisions were voted upon by the synods separately and were taken unanimously by both synods. It was determined that both the GKN and DGK would convene later in the year in the

WEBSITES:

GKN:

www.gereformeerdekerkennederland.nl

DGK:

www.dgkh.nl

TASKFORCE REFLECTION:

www.bezinninggkv.nl

same location in separate synods which could then meet together to decide concerning the union.

On the evening of October 4, a prayer service led by Rev. C. Koster (DGK) and Rev. R. Visser (GKN) was held. Rev. Visser preached on the closing verses of Psalm 122, exhorting that the church is not to be a church of fighters but a palace of peace.¹ Following the service, greetings were read from the FRCA, FRCSA, and OPC, and in-person speeches were given by the CanRC and SERK.

The next day, the two synods convened in separate rooms of the same church building. I began the day sitting in as fraternal observer with the GKN synod. Within two hours I found myself seated at the DGK synod as church polity advisor.

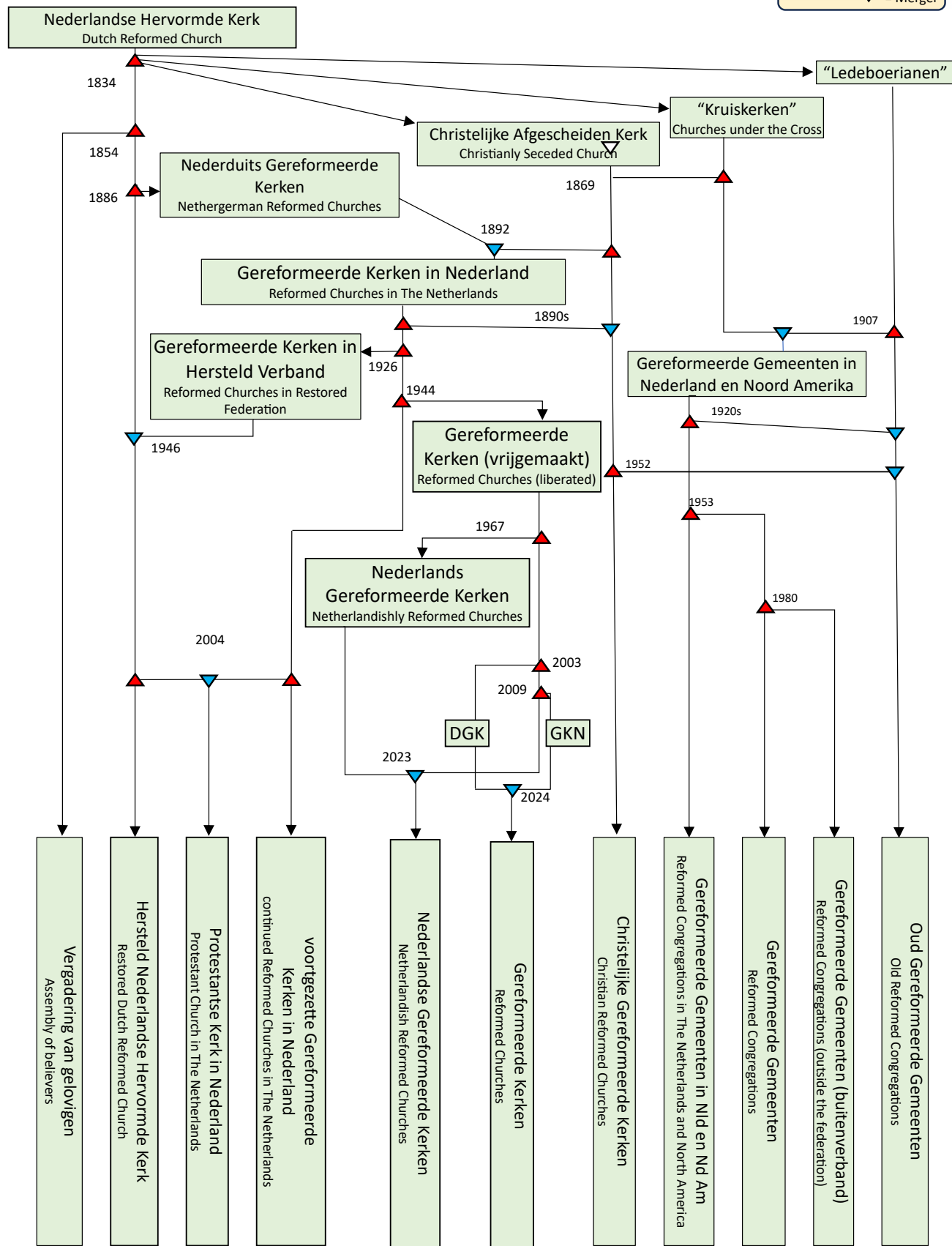
The DGK had to deal with two matters prior to deciding on the merger. The first was the readmission of a local DGK into the federation. It had been placed outside the federation due to its failure to abide by broader assembly decisions regarding a matter involving its minister. It was clear during the DGK synod that this matter had been resolved: the minister in question, a member of the DGK synod, attested to this, as well as representatives of the church in question, who were also present.

The second matter were five appeals from individual church members against the decision to merge with the GKN. It's worth noting that in the CanRC such appeals would be declared inadmissible, as they concern a matter common to the churches, and such matters may only be appealed by churches, not church members. The DGK did consider them admissible. None of the five appeals were sustained.

¹ Geen vechterskerk maar vredespleis. The intention is to translate this sermon and publish it in Lux Mundi, the online magazine of the ICRC.

Reformed in The Netherlands – 1800 to 2024

Legend  = Schism  = Merger



By early afternoon the two synods gathered in a single room to decide on the merger. Following discussion, the basic decision to merge was taken unanimously by each synod voting separately. Deciding on a name for the new federation took some discussion. The majority vote was for “Reformed Churches.” The reason for dropping a reference to “the Netherlands” was to create an acronym that could not be confused with any other historic or extant church federation in the Netherlands. From now on, it will be the GK. Next the decision was taken to redivide the almost thirty churches over three classes. All classes have both originally DGK and GKN in them. It was left to the local churches and the classes to decide on whether and, if so, how to merge any “overlapping” churches.

When the synods adjourned on October 5, not all business was completed. There was diversity of opinion regarding both theological training and interchurch relations. I’m not aware yet what was decided regarding theological training (I did advocate strongly for CRTS to be part of the picture).

Regarding interchurch relations, on November 30, 2024, the combined synods decided to continue the sister church relationship with SERK, to seek sister church relations with the CanRC, FRCA, and FRCSA, to continue membership in the ICRC, and to establish a contact relationship with the OPC. The GK also adopted categories of relationships similar to those being proposed by our CER to our GS 2025.

The synods have not yet closed. But it was time to get this snapshot out to you...

FELLOWSHIP

There is much reason to rejoice with our brothers and sisters in the Netherlands. Our only High Priest prayed that his followers might be one (John 17:21a). The Holy Spirit inspired an apostle to urge a multi-ethnic church “to be eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph 4:3). Our fellow saints, in spite of differences and concerns, readily and eagerly found a practical way in which to express the unity they experience spiritually.

With this step taken, it will also be appropriate for us as churches “across the ocean” to enter into full ecclesiastical fellowship with the GK. What a joyful moment it will be, when once again we can wholeheartedly practice full fellowship with God’s people in the Netherlands! 



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The Protestant Reformed Churches **IN AMERICA**

In the introductory article for this column, I used the image of families picnicking in a park as an analogy of Presbyterian and Reformed churches who are members of NAPARC, the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council. It was explained that the aim of this column was to pay attention to some churches you might expect to be members of NAPARC because they have the word Presbyterian or Reformed in their name, but they are not. In keeping with the picnic image, the aim was to find out why these churches are outside the PARC.

Of the four churches covered so far, one used to be in the PARC but was told to leave (Christian Reformed Church). The other three appear never to have shown any interest in coming to the PARC (Reformed Church in America, Presbyterian Church in Canada, and the Communion of Evangelical Reformed Churches). The group under consideration this time has had a presence in NAPARC for many years as an invited observer, but no moves have been made to become a full participant. This group is the Protestant Reformed Churches in America (PRCA). At present, the PRCA consists of some thirty-three churches and has over 8700 members.

HISTORY & CONNECTION TO THE CANRC

The PRCA has its roots in the Christian Reformed Churches of North America (CRC). According to its official website (prca.org), the PRCA was founded as a denomination late in 1924 because the CRC Synod adopted the doctrine of “common grace.” The gist of this teaching was that God shows a non-saving grace to the unbelieving world, restraining the sinfulness of men and enabling them to do some good, so that society can function and life can

develop. Three ministers and consistories who did not agree with this doctrine were suspended and dismissed from office and denied standing in the CRC for not submitting to this decision. These expelled consistories initially formed a temporary organization called the “Protesting Christian Reformed Churches,” to appeal these actions. When their appeal was denied in 1926, they officially became the Protestant Reformed Churches. While it is hard to find exact figures for the number of churches and membership at that time, it appears that, over the next decade, about twelve more churches joined the PRCA throughout the American Midwest and as far west as Los Angeles.

In the early 1950s, the PRCA experienced a major doctrinal controversy, resulting in the loss of 60% of its members, leaving a membership of about 2350. The issue was regarding the understanding of the covenant and the offer of the gospel. The PRCA Synod of 1951 adopted a Declaration of Principles which states, among other things, that “Grace is always saving and particular, never common to all; The Gospel promise is efficacious and only for the elect; The covenant is unconditional and only with the elect.”¹

It is this Declaration that brings out the historical connection to the Canadian Reformed Churches, for it proved to be the breaking point for the Dutch immigrants from a Liberated background who had first thought they could find a church home in the Protestant Reformed Churches. By essentially equating covenant with election, and the impact that had on the truth of God’s promise made to children at their baptism, they saw a replay of one of the key issues that had led to the Liberation in 1944, namely, the teachings concerning presumptive regeneration and how it was imposed

¹ <https://www.prca.org/about/official-standards/creeds/declaration-of-principles>

on the churches. At issue is the truth of God's promise made at baptism. The PRCA made it clear that it taught that God's covenant promises are only for the elect and their elect children. This Declaration of Principles, therefore, contributed to the formation of the Canadian Reformed Churches as well as the loss of those who eventually rejoined the CRC.

At issue is the truth of God's promise made at baptism

For a fuller description of these events, a helpful resource is the relevant section in the book *Inheritance Preserved*, by Rev. W. W. J. VanOene (Revised Edition, 1991. pp 63–69).

OTHER DISTINCTIVE BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

The PRCA also make a point of the way they oppose divorce and remarriage. Even if a person divorces for what might be considered legitimate grounds, that person should not remarry. Only death breaks the marriage bond. They also believe that Christian schools are a demand of the covenant. They use the King James Version of the Bible, seeing it as the best, most faithful translation.

RECENT TURMOIL

While the website states that “at the present time there is stability and steady growth, lovely activity, and peace for these churches,” in 2021 a group separated from the PRCA, forming a new denomination by the name of *Reformed Protestant Churches*. In their Act of Separation, the accusation is leveled that “the glorious gospel of salvation by God's grace alone has not been preached purely but has been polluted with the filth of conditional theology.”² Judging by some of the Acts of the synods, this issue came to the fore in response to sermons preached by a minister in which hearers were called to faith and obedience, which was said to undermine the teaching of the unconditional covenant. This separation affected many of their churches in the USA and Canada, as well as sister churches in the Philippines and Singapore.

Another issue pertains to the efforts to deal with sexual abuse accusations. The 2023 Synod decided to utilize a third party to help the PRCA address this issue. The 2024 Synod dealt with several appeals against this decision. Error was admitted. Among other statements, Synod 2024 decided that “Synod 2023's decision conflicts with the Bible's teaching that the church, in carrying out

her calling, must consciously depend on God for His help, may turn to others within the church for their help, but may not turn to a secular organization for help in investigating cases of sin. As was pointed out in the protests, ‘the church of Jesus Christ is spiritually distinct in character from that of a secular organization.’”³ This decision is understandable when one keeps in mind that PRCA was founded in part in rejection of the teaching of common grace, which suggested there could be good outside the church through the gracious working of God.

IRONY

In reviewing the history of the PRCA, one cannot help but detect a sense of irony. It was founded in reaction to feeling unjustly bound to decisions regarding common grace. Yet, in the 1950s, it came up with its own binding, making the Declaration of Principles and its explanation of the unconditional covenant a condition for membership.

In the second place, while it stresses the unconditional covenant, it places several conditions upon its members. Beside the binding to the Declaration, conditions for membership are acceptance of their view on marriage and divorce as well as Christian schooling.

SURPRISING PRESENCE AT NAPARC

When one considers the stance of the PRCA, it is not surprising that they have not sought to be full members of NAPARC. Their Declaration goes beyond the confessional basis of NAPARC. In a way it is surprising that they send observers. At the same time, the presence of observers is a hopeful sign. Willingness to attend NAPARC, even as observers, is an implicit acknowledgment of the confessional faithfulness of the churches represented there. By interacting at the ecclesiastical picnic called NAPARC and experiencing fellowship of other faithful men, in the long run it may lead to a softening of some of their positions, or at the very least allowing for a difference of opinion within the boundaries of the Reformed confessions, so they can feel more at home in the broader community of faithful Reformed and Presbyterian churches. Perhaps by God's grace, someday they will move from being invited observers to full members. 



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² <https://firstpc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Act-of-Separation.pdf>

³ [https://www.prca.org/about/church-government/synod Day 7](https://www.prca.org/about/church-government/synod%20Day%207)

WITNESS AT WORK

MEET SAMUEL

Traditional Plasterer

ILSE VANDERMEULEN



Samuel van Esch in front of the south side main entrance of Province House in Charlottetown, PEI. Roughly 40% of the exterior stonework was replaced, as can be seen by the new light coloured stones.



Clarion is interviewing various professionals in our Reformed community to highlight how they are serving the Lord in their particular industry or calling. In this issue we interview Samuel van Esch (age 26).

BACKGROUND

Where most of us in our jobs face constant change and new technology, Samuel van Esch is a skilled tradesman in a craft that has not changed since the pyramids of Egypt: traditional plastering.

Samuel grew up in Ontario where he attended the Emmanuel Canadian Reformed Church in Guelph. He was homeschooled for most of his life and obtained his high school diploma at Guelph's Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Highschool in 2016. He worked at his father's construction company, Van Esch Enterprises, and developed a love for plaster. Sam is married to Elaine. After their wedding last summer, they moved to Prince Edward Island for two years, where Sam works on the restoration of Province House, the national historic site in Charlottetown where the confederation talks were held leading to the founding of Canada in 1867. He has taken on significant responsibilities at the project, organizing up to ten employees and working and communicating with all other trades, architects, and government bodies involved in the project.

In his spare time, Sam loves playing soccer and driving fast cars. He enjoys taking out his Hyundai Veloster N on the windy Maritime roads and hopefully sometime soon on the Cabot Trail in Cape Breton, NS.

HOW DID YOU BECOME A TRADITIONAL PLASTERER?

Most tradesmen, when they go into buildings, look at something that interests them. A plumber will look at the faucets and plumbing fixtures, that kind of thing. For me, already from an early age, I was interested in the walls and the ceilings: the large surfaces in a building. When I sit in a

church, I notice how the walls and ceiling look. It can distract me from the sermon! I love for them to be really nice. Walls and ceilings in most buildings are in my opinion quite frankly terrible!

During my high school years, I worked for my father's company in construction. In grade 12 I applied and was accepted into university. However, I first worked between graduation and the beginning of my studies and I enjoyed it so much that I decided to stay in the workforce.

The majority of my family's company work is in century homes and historic buildings. I am very familiar with older homes from the 1800s and early 1900s. Older homes are fundamentally different from modern builds. Their foundations are often stone instead of poured concrete. The wood that is used often comes from old growth wood, so the measurements of the lumber are proper: a 2x2 is a 2x2. The old homes up until the sixties mostly have wood lath on the walls with plaster and ceilings with crown molding and decorative elements of swirls, leaves, and medallions. Most plaster gets removed and replaced by drywall today as it is cheaper. Unfortunately, there are not a lot of tradesmen anymore who are able to apply or repair the traditional plaster.

I developed a passion for drywalling, but the problem with drywall finishing is that it can *never* be perfect. So, I wanted a better way to get a nice wall or ceiling and realized you could do that with plaster: a mixture of lime, sand, and goat hair put on wood lath or—more modern—metal laths. I wanted to learn traditional plastering, but in North America that is not an easy thing to do as it hardly exists anymore.

At some point I stumbled upon a project in Elora where a house was being plastered and I was able to speak to the plasterer, Keiran Reid. He

came from Scotland and is one of very few traditional plasterers in Canada who masters the trade professionally. He is exceptional at it, and he was willing to let me work with him.

HOW DID YOU END UP AT PROVINCE HOUSE?

Keiran Reid was hired as the lead plasterer for the Province House National Historic Site conservation project located in Charlottetown, PEI. Our trade is so rare that, except for me, he had to hire two plasterers from abroad. The renovations are managed by Public Services and Procurement Canada, on behalf of Parks Canada. The work happening at Province House involves highly skilled engineers, architects, consultants, project managers, and tradespeople. We have a team of four plasterers, one person does lathwork, and we have eight labourers who move material, make plaster mixtures, and set up scaffolding. We plaster all the interior surfaces, including decorative elements: all the walls and ceilings of the first, second, and third floor, including medallions, crown molding in many of the rooms, and fixing pillars or aspects of pillars. We formed and replaced all four of the Fleur-de-lis details, including the two parallel trim pieces that border the ceiling in the Confederation Room. The three medallions were existing and required significant repairs.

It is a very special opportunity to work on this project and conserve 175 years of Canadian history. To be able to work on a proper restoration of such a significant building is really cool. I love to make things as high quality as I am able. To know that my work is going to be viewed by so many people is interesting to me and I enjoy the project very much. We have stripped paint off of walls and found writings of Isaac Smith, the original architect of the building from 1847. That was really cool.

I expect in the future I might get hired for other federal projects. Working on the Parliament buildings in Ottawa would be very nice. Centre Block has a lot of plaster work. And it seems that there may be many plaster projects around the country that the federal government is going to work on.

WHAT DO YOU LIKE ABOUT YOUR WORK?

Plaster is such a time proven thing; it's not overly complicated, but it's a pretty proven trade. It just makes sense. Plaster is fire-proof and provides smoke proofing to a house. It's healthier as well, as it allows air to access the walls. Plaster goes back as far as we know history. The makeup of plaster today is still three parts sand to one part lime and you add goat or horse hair. Civilization has had access to these materials forever. Even the tools we use have not changed much. Obviously we have more comfortable

handles on our trowels and such, but our trade and tools have been the same as thousands of years ago.

I pray on a regular basis that God blesses the work of my hands. In my case, that is literal. Prayer is the most important part of our thankfulness, but our work follows closely behind that because work is what we do for the majority of our time. It makes sense that you do your work in a way that brings God glory. Every time I pick up plaster, I know I have to do my work well, because I do it for God. He is an artist, the Creator, and he sees the work I do; all of our artistry ultimately comes from him. It's a gift from him and we can ascribe it back to him.

Working with Mr. Reid has been such a blessing to me. He is very particular and holds himself and my work to a very high standard. I recognize God's providence in having this rare opportunity of working on this special project. Also, through my parents and their teachings of hard work and high standards, God prepared me for this trade and coming out here to Prince Edward Island.

WHAT ARE SOME OTHER CHALLENGES OF YOUR WORK?

Being a plasterer is physically demanding. There is nothing easy about what I do physically. When we apply the plaster, we need to put a lot of pressure on it; when we polish it, we need to push hard. It burns your shoulder and elbow. Then there is making the plaster and carrying heavy pails up the scaffolding. You get used to it, but it is hard work.

We expected that relocating to another province would be challenging. We miss our family in Ontario, but so far it has been really good. Having a United Reformed Church here has been such a blessing. It is a small congregation, but definitely quite alive. We were welcomed quickly and we seem to do things weekly with people from church. That has really helped! And hey, there's a lot of good seafood here too!

Moving from working for my family's Christian company to this project also had its challenges as I realize that many people don't find much joy in their work. I worked with my father and brothers, and we had the same mindset: you don't complain, and when you run into an issue you try to solve it. In this company I work mostly with secular people and people often complain about work or don't show up. I am not used to that, and I find it difficult to deal with.

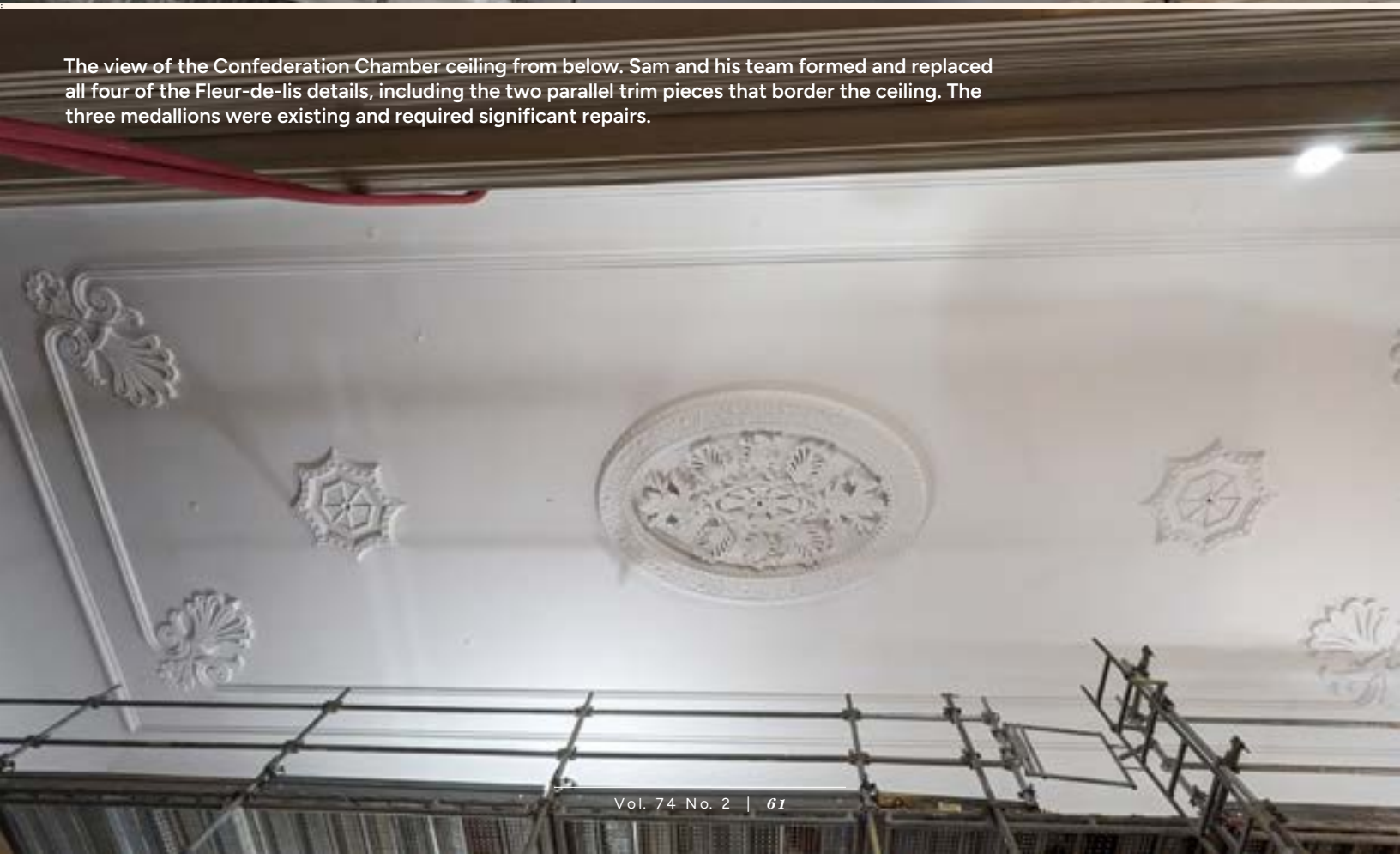
HOW CAN YOU LIVE OUT YOUR REFORMED FAITH IN YOUR WORK?

People at work notice that I go to church on Sundays and I don't use swear words, but mostly people notice that I enjoy my work

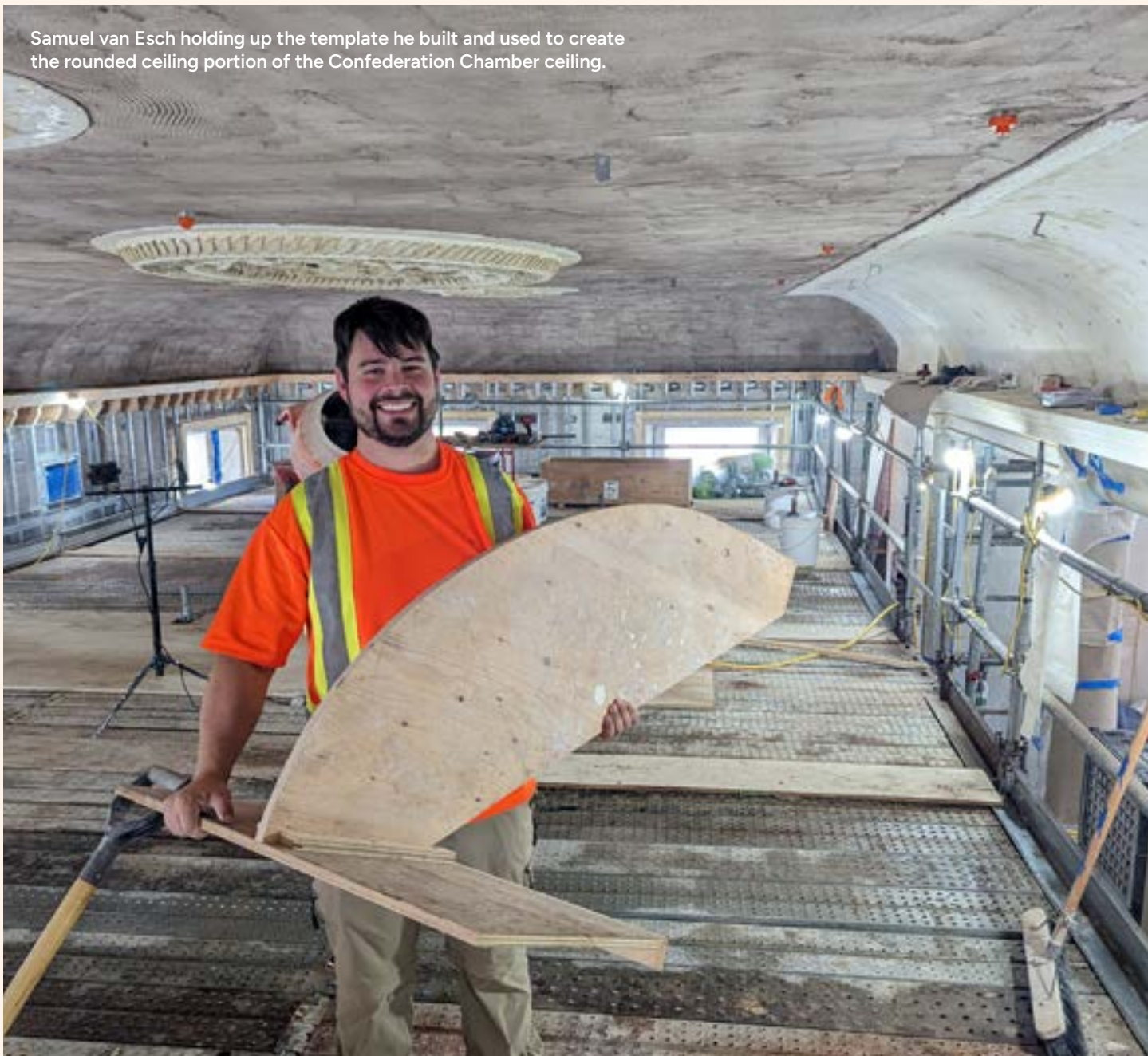
A side view of the Confederation Chamber ceiling from the third floor balcony that overlooks the chamber.



The view of the Confederation Chamber ceiling from below. Sam and his team formed and replaced all four of the Fleur-de-lis details, including the two parallel trim pieces that border the ceiling. The three medallions were existing and required significant repairs.



Samuel van Esch holding up the template he built and used to create the rounded ceiling portion of the Confederation Chamber ceiling.



and have a different work ethic. One security guard calls me “the happiest guy on the job site.” A lot of people in our society are not motivated to do their work. They complain or don’t show up. It is interesting to see that having a relationship with the Lord gives you such a different outlook on work compared to the next guy on the job. I’m a person who makes the most of a situation and I feel blessed to have a job that I enjoy.

There are a lot of Bible texts about skilled labour, and they interest me. Proverbs 22:28 says, “Do you see a man skillful in his work? He will stand before kings.” I like that a lot. If you are skilled in your work, it might get noticed by people, even a government, but ultimately, we do it for our King!

The renovations at Province House are in the third of four stages. The final phase of the project involves the development of Parks

Canada’s new visitor experience for Province House as well as the design, development, and installation of new interpretive exhibits. The Legislative Assembly hopes to reconvene its sessions in the building in the fall of 2025, when Province House is scheduled to reopen for the public.

For more information on the project: <https://parks.canada.ca/lln-nhs/pe/provincehouse>



Ilse VanderMeulen
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DAVID RAWSON!

Hi Everyone,

I would like to introduce myself to you. My name is David Rawson. I would like to thank Margret and Grace for writing this for the Ray of Sunshine. It has been seven years since we last wrote about David.

Every year we celebrate my birthday on March 9. This year the Lord willing I will be 63. I live at Twin Oaks in Burlington, Ontario. The manager is Grace, and my housemates are Ron and Derrick.

On Wednesday mornings I am up early to get ready to help out at the Niagara Christian Gleaners in Smithville. My friend, Kurt, will pick me up to drive me there. I enjoy working there. I put labels on the bags. Every Thursday and every other Saturday I work at the New Mission Thrift Store in Burlington with Ron.

My home church is Burlington Ebenezer Canadian Reformed Church. On Sundays I enjoy listening to Pastor Tony and Pastor Clarence. Since a few weeks ago, with help from my wonderful ward elder, we

are using an app on the computer/phone that translates the sermons into sign language so I can enjoy God's Word being preached.

In October I went on a bus trip with Grace to visit "Little Canada" in Toronto to see all the miniature buildings from all over Canada. It was awesome. We had lunch at the Spaghetti Factory, and they had a very old telephone booth there, and we took a picture of me standing in the phone booth.

At home I help out with the chores around the house. I think of myself as being very fussy and tidy, so I am always doing something. To relax I enjoy playing solitaire on the computer and watching a show. I enjoy going for walks when the weather is warmer. I love to visit with my family and friends.

If you are in the area, please feel free to come and visit. We just ask that you call first because we all have busy schedules.

Until next time, David, Margret, and Grace.

MARCH BIRTHDAYS

3 Trevor Hofsink will be 47
14407 McQueen Road
Edmonton, AB
T5N 3L3

9 David Rawson will be 63
c/o Twin Oaks
3217 Twin Oaks Cres
Burlington, ON
L7M 3A8

13 John VanWyngaarden will be 47
c/o Beacon Home
653 Broad Street West
Dunnville, ON
N1A 1T8

14 Tineille VanRootselaar will be 30
219 Lock St W
Dunnville, ON
N1A 1V2

14 Lisa Alkema will be 44
c/o Harbour Home
42 Spadara Drive
Hamilton, ON
L9B 2K3
email: lhalkema@gmail.com

15 Jim VanderHeiden will be 66
c/o Beacon Home
653 Broad Street West
Dunnville, ON
N1A 1T8

23 Brent Baartman will be 36
C/O Anchor Home
361 Thirty Road
Grimsby, ON
L3M 0L1

*Happy birthday to all of you celebrating a birthday in March!
We wish you the Lord's blessing in the year to come.*

Rachel Vis

RCNZ Synod 2024

Kia Ora, welcome to Aotearoa. For most of our readers these words may not sound very familiar. *Kia Ora* means “hello” in the language of the Maori, the indigenous people of New Zealand, and *Aotearoa* is the Maori name for New Zealand. It is unique that in New Zealand the every-day English is absorbing Maori words. The country has more unique features. It has about five times more sheep than people. And yes, it is a land of outstanding natural beauty. But it’s especially encouraging to know that also here the Lord Jesus Christ gathers his church.

From September 7–12, 2024 I had the privilege of attending the synod of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand as fraternal delegate representing the Canadian Reformed Churches. It was not the original plan to go by myself, but because of unexpected personal circumstances my fellow delegate had to cancel his trip at the last minute.

WHO ARE THE RCNZ?

The RCNZ is a relatively small federation in this island nation and has been sister churches of the CanRC since 2007. In New Zealand the first Reformed church was established in 1953 by Dutch immigrants. The federation has roots in the continental (Dutch) Reformed tradition, but from early on there was also a fairly strong Presbyterian influence. Since the very beginning their confessional documents included both the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Standards. And throughout the years several OPC ministers have served these churches well. Interestingly, this influence is also reflected in their church order language: office bearers meet as *session* (= our consistories), and sessions send delegates to *presbyteries*, which function much like our classes do.

Currently there are twenty-two churches in the federation along with three church plants. These churches meet in three presbyteries: two on the North Island, and one on the South Island. Their synod meets at least every three years, and every church sends two voting delegates. This makes for a manageable size to have a deliberative discussion of the items on the agenda.

SYNOD BEGINS

In the afternoon of Saturday, September 7, synod was opened by Rev. Josh Meinsma on behalf of the convening church of Christchurch. After checking the credentials and the election of the moderamen, the moderator Rev. Reinier Noppers declared the 32nd synod of the RCNZ officially constituted. With these and some other preliminary things out of the way, synod would be able to get into its agenda first thing Monday morning. A prayer service was held on the Saturday evening. Rev. Noppers, who had also been moderator of the previous synod, led the service and preached from 1 Corinthians 1:1–3. Other brothers took turns leading in prayer.

On Monday, September 9, the actual synod work started; under the capable leadership of Rev. Noppers, business was completed and synod could be closed on Thursday, September 12 at noon. That was quick! Apparently, it was the shortest synod in the history of the RCNZ. The fact that there were no appeals or controversial matters on the agenda, and that voting was almost always unanimous, is an indication of a good level of unity and mutual trust among the churches and office bearers in the RCNZ. That’s a joyful observation and reason to praise Christ, the Head of the church.

As usual at this kind of meeting, synod dealt with a number of reports, mostly from synodical standing committees, as well as with thirteen overtures. It was interesting to note that the RCNZ synod does not work with advisory committees. Committee reports and overtures come in a format that has recommendations, supported by grounds, ready to be voted on.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The report of the Conversion Therapy Study Committee is an interesting and helpful document. After being received by synod it will appear in the Acts, but I think it would be worthwhile to give it some more publicity.
- The RCNZ have their own Psalter Hymnal, *Sing To The Lord*. Synod approved the psalms and hymns in the Trinity Psalter Hymnal (OPC/URC) for use as a supplementary

resource, but stated emphatically that *Sing To The Lord* should remain the primary songbook.

- The New Zealand churches do not have their own theological training. Students for the ministry study at a variety of Reformed seminaries. So far our CRTS is not on the list, but the fact that in the meantime two young men, who studied at CRTS, have become ministers in New Zealand might help to put Hamilton on the RCNZ radar, so to speak. That being said, several reports and overtures show that the churches of the RCNZ are directly involved in encouraging, supporting, and spiritually guiding the progress of their men wherever they are training for the ministry.
- Along with the CanRC, the RCNZ share a number of sister churches that were also represented at Synod Christchurch: the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, and the United Reformed Churches. Geographically the FRCA is relatively close to the RCNZ, and it is encouraging that over the last years the relationship between the two has been growing stronger, with increasing mutual appreciation.

FRATERNAL ADDRESS

On Wednesday, September 11, I had the privilege to address synod to convey greetings on behalf of the CanRC. I told them a

few things about developments in our churches in Canada, as well as some of the challenges we are facing. I mentioned our increasing focus on urban mission projects in our own cities, but also shared the joy of our good cooperation with the RCNZ and the FRCA in Papua New Guinea. As sister churches we are to encourage each other to remain faithful, and warn each other where needed, as well as be examples to each other. With a fraternal visit once every three years the opportunity to do so may be limited, but spending time with the brothers over the full duration of synod gives also ample time for personal conversations. On behalf of synod Rev. David Stares expressed the thankfulness for our sister-church relationship.

I have come to love and appreciate the RCNZ as a faithful and confessional church federation, committed to the truth of God's Word and the Reformed faith as expressed in the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Standards. All praise and glory to him, who continues to gather his church from all nations. 🙏



Jan DeGelder

Minister Emeritus

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READ AND SEARCH OLD VOLUMES

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clarionmagazine.ca/archive



IRTC

INTERNATIONAL REFORMED THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE

My IRTC Sojourn

It was in the Fall of 2009 when I first got in touch with Pastor Ralph Boersema following a notice in one of our church periodicals. He was looking for someone to help out with the IRTC and since I had just retired from my full-time job, I thought I would give it a whirl. Here we are about fifteen years later, and I'm still involved in this ministry, although I've now handed over my duties as the Development Director to Jack Marissen, who is also on the board of the IRTC Society in Canada.

At the time I got involved, there was no Canadian society, so that was one of the first things that kept me busy. It was a bit of a laborious process to get a charitable organization set up in Canada, but we had some good connections which made it possible in a timely manner. Now we were able to issue tax receipts to individual donors and start processing payments from a number of churches, either via their budgets or via separate collections. All this, of course, took a lot of contacts, emails and letters. This was all done in the interest of paying for instructors and administrators of the IRTC, which has been ongoing for many years now and which keeps on growing. In the past few years especially, the number of students has kept increasing and so the need for instructors does also. Thankfully, we've been able to do that with many talented people in different parts of the world.

Initially I did much of the administrative work in Canada by myself, but gradually I was able to recruit some willing and capable board members to help, and there currently are five people on the board. Over the past fifteen years, I was able to develop a good working relationship with Pastor Ralph and his wife Lucille and I treasure that connection to this day. Their dedication to this ministry and the hard work they did was inspirational and kept me going as well. I also got to connect with many others in the organization either face to face or via Zoom calls or correspondence.

I trust that I may have contributed modestly to the work of the IRTC and as we enter the twenty-fifth anniversary year of this online college, I would encourage you to consider becoming a regular supporter (if you are not one already) or asking your



Harold J. Ludwig

church to do so as well. You can visit our website (either US or Canada) for information on how to do that. May the Lord continue to bless the ongoing work done by the IRTC and may it be to His glory alone. Thank you for allowing me to be a part of this ministry for these many years.

The IRTC is deeply grateful for Mr. Harold J. Ludwig's nearly 15 years of dedicated service as Development Director for the IRTC Society. His tireless efforts in raising awareness and support for the IRTC, particularly among Canadian Reformed Churches, have been instrumental in strengthening the College's mission. Harold's diligence, strategic insights, and unwavering commitment have left an indelible mark on the IRTC's work and community. As Harold steps down from this role, we look forward to his continued contributions as a member of the Board and pray that the Lord will richly bless him in all his endeavors. Thank you, Harold, for your faithful partnership in the service of Reformed theological education!

Give the Gift of Theological Education in 2025

As we reflect on 2024, our hearts are filled with gratitude for God's faithful provision. Through His grace and the generosity of supporters like you, we were able to meet our budget for the year, enabling the International Reformed Theological College (IRTC) to continue equipping leaders for gospel ministry. This year has been filled with blessings and milestones, including the launch of our Basic Theology Course, which was met with great enthusiasm. We also welcomed students from all corners of the globe, representing South America, Africa, Europe, and beyond, highlighting the growing reach of this ministry.

In addition to these achievements, we made significant strides in improving our Virtual Learning Environment, enhancing its functionality and security to serve our students and faculty better. We also strengthened our academic programs by welcoming new professors with advanced degrees, ensuring that the education we provide remains both rigorous and impactful.

Looking ahead, we are excited by the opportunities before us but also mindful of the challenges we must address to sustain and expand this work. One key priority is raising

additional support in the United States to ensure the fair compensation of our faculty and staff located there, whose work is essential to the mission of the IRTC. Meeting this need is critical to maintaining the quality and sustainability of our programs while expanding our ability to reach more students worldwide.

Would you prayerfully consider partnering with us in this new year? Your gift plays a direct role in advancing this ministry—whether through scholarships for students in need, supporting our faculty, or helping develop new courses and resources. By giving, you are investing in the training of pastors, missionaries, and church leaders who will impact their communities and the world with the hope of the gospel.

We invite you to make a lasting difference by giving the gift of theological education. To donate, please visit the links below. Together, we can meet the challenges of 2025 with faith, confidence, and a commitment to advancing God's kingdom. Your support inspires and equips us to continue this vital mission, and we look forward to what God will accomplish in the year ahead.

MAKE AN IMPACT

Did you know:

Over **77 million Portuguese speakers** live across the African continent. Many of them hunger for deep, biblical training, but financial challenges often stand in the way. The IRTC is committed to making theological education accessible by offering reduced tuition fees for students in Africa.

This means **your scholarship donations can empower twice as many students** to receive quality theological training! Join us in equipping the next generation of Christian leaders in Africa. Donate today using the methods below and be a part of this mission.



\$217,420
2024 Budget

99%

\$216,865
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Theological College
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Bristol, VA 24201 USA



E-mail: contact@irtc.online

A close-up photograph of a man with a beard and a young child sitting together. The man is holding an open book, and the child is looking down at it with a focused expression. The man is wearing a blue denim shirt, and the child is wearing a red and blue plaid shirt. The background is softly blurred, showing a window with light coming through. The overall mood is warm and intimate.

INTRODUCING CHILDREN TO BIBLE STORIES

Editor's Note: Mr. John Scott kindly agreed to my request to review his top choices for Bible story books. In conjunction with his picks, I have added two of my own at the end of his list. The article is otherwise written by John.



All of us *love* stories. No matter our age, we listen to stories and read stories. We watch a great mystery story on TV and try to figure out “whodunit” before the credits roll. We all also *have* stories. Some parts of our stories are hilarious, some dramatic; some may even be romantic, while other episodes of our story are filled with pain and fear.

God also has a story, and he has told it to us in his Word, the Bible. God’s story is filled with generations of people whom God in his sovereignty has chosen to call and claim as his own. Some demonstrate consistent faithfulness, while others may cause us to question why God chose them to be his before creation when he knew how bad they would be. Yet if we look in the mirror, our questions fade into nothing as we realize that we too are saved by grace alone. All this we learn in God’s story.

LEARNING GOD’S STORY

One thing that is increasingly obvious is the declining ability of children in our society to recall biblical accounts of characters like Joseph, Moses, or Esther. Even among children who have grown up in North American churches, there is a general decrease of basic Bible knowledge. And then it becomes painfully obvious the many who don’t know the God behind these tremendous accounts.

From the stories of the Bible, we learn the character and attributes of God. God tells us his story through human authors which is what we mean when we say that God’s Word is inspired. Through his Word, and the reading of the stories of God’s interaction with people, we see what God is like. The accounts of interaction with people are true, and when we know them and believe them, our lives are changed.

We tell stories of God that are found in his Word so that others may know God better and we can have a relationship with him and learn how to imitate him in our lives. Too frequently, Bible storytellers or Bible storybooks present human Bible characters and moralize the episodes of their lives. You’ve

probably heard these retellings: “Character X was kind and good. We should be like character X.” No wonder so many young people can’t tell the difference between a story from the Bible or a story from Aesop’s Fables or the Brothers Grimm!

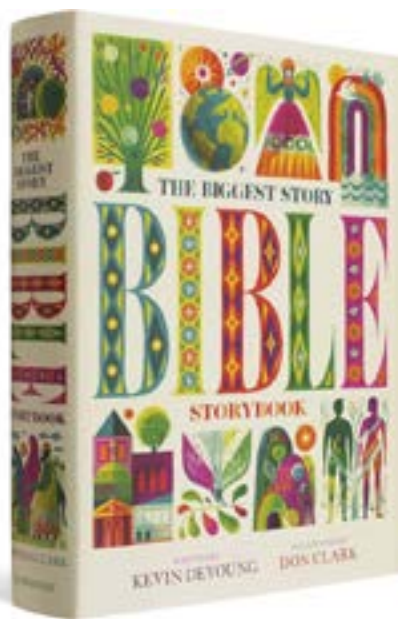
Christian parents with the support of the church (and the Christian school) have a responsibility to ensure that their children are taught God’s story of redemption. Children also need to see living examples of people around them who demonstrate the character of God in their lives because there is often a tension between the faith that is taught and the faith that is caught.

Below are Bible storybooks which have been published as resources to aid families in the biblical instruction of their children. It is good to make use of a few different Bible storybooks over your child-rearing years so that the same stories aren’t repeated over and over. Different authors can present various details of the story from the Scriptures and each book will have its strengths and weaknesses. By making use of a few storybooks and their combined greater number of stories, the standard “favourites” (the flood, David and Goliath, etc.) are not being presented repeatedly. The different books below are presented without ranking (basically in chronological order, newest to oldest) as recommendations of quality resources for Reformed families.

They are also presented with caution. None of them can ever replace Scripture itself. All of them are drawn from Scripture and should drive us back to Scripture. We all need to be like the Bereans and listen to the teaching of God’s Word and be driven to his Word to ensure its accuracy. Each selection made below has a target audience of the elementary aged child. All could be recommended to parents to aid in the instruction of children, yet all are in some way or another, flawed—just like the human characters that they tell about. But all point to the main character of God’s great story—God himself.

THE BIGGEST STORY BIBLE STORYBOOK

by Kevin DeYoung with illustrations
by Don Clark (Crossway, 2021)



This is a collection of more than 100 stories from every major section of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation. It is written by well-known and respected pastor and author, Kevin DeYoung.

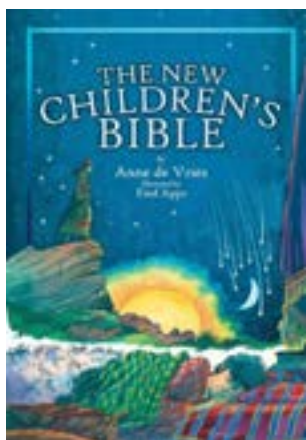
There are several strengths to this book. Each story from both the Old and New Testaments faithfully point to Jesus. In his introductory “Note to Parents” he quickly and humbly points out that God’s Word is inspired and inerrant; DeYoung’s retelling of God’s Word is not. In DeYoung’s work, each story is short and uses simple language to outline sometimes difficult content. On one hand, difficult words and concepts are explained very briefly; on the other hand, simple concepts are explained with an attempt at wit (almost; cue the eye roll from the young teenage listener—DeYoung is a dad after all!). While each story seems like a *Reader’s Digest* version of the original, he effectively wraps up the story in the final paragraph(s) with God’s purposes in the narrative while also guiding the readers in a suggested prayer.

In his introduction DeYoung addresses the issue of pictures in a Bible Storybook designed for children. He writes,

This book includes pictures of Jesus. That presents certain dangers. Some children’s books present Jesus in ways that are culturally unrealistic, cartoonishly silly, or lifelike in a way that can lead children to think ‘this is what Jesus looks like.’ We tried to avoid those dangers. In the end, we thought it would seem strange, if not theologically misleading, to have a big book where Jesus never shows his face but appears only in shadows and silhouettes. We believe by presenting Jesus in a way that is obviously artistically stylized, we are not depicting the God-man or trying to say this is what Jesus was like as much as we are trying to tell the story of the Bible without keeping the main character offstage for every scene.

THE NEW CHILDREN’S BIBLE

by Anne de Vries and illustrated by Fred Apps (Christian Focus 4 Kids Publications, 2014) Hardcover. [Summary by P. Holtvüwer]



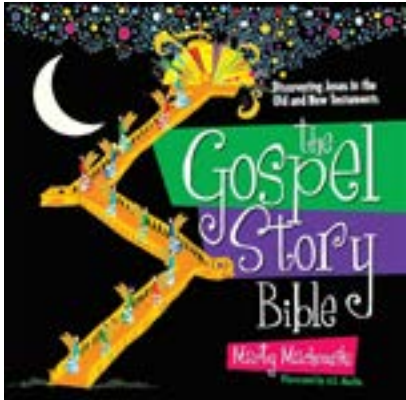
This is a “golden oldie” but one to which parents and children have been continually drawn for many decades. Anne de Vries was a prolific Dutch Christian author in the earlier part of the twentieth century whose books include the novel *Bartje*. His retelling of the Bible’s stories for children was so popular that his work (first published in the 1930s!) was translated into English early on and continues to be reprinted. Christian Focus Publications in 2014 updated the text and refreshed some of the illustrations to produce a very handsome and readable Bible story book for your children. The illustrations are sensitively done and evidently a decision was made to avoid depicting Jesus.

Apart from the quality of the production, what is most impressive about de Vries’s work is how faithful each story is to Scripture and how easily understood they are by children. The book contains 100 stories from both the Old and the New Testaments. One drawback is that some stories are very long while others are very short, so for the children’s sake the reader may need to break up the longer ones into two parts. De Vries also did not include extra commentary or questions (too bad!) but concentrated on bringing the Bible story to life for children.

THE GOSPEL STORY BIBLE:

Discovering Jesus in the old and new testament

by Marty Machowski and illustrated by
A.E. Macha (New Growth Press, 2011)



This is a collection of more than 150 stories from both the Old and New Testaments. These extremely well written narratives are effective for families with a wide range of listeners' ages. The gospel is clearly presented in every story.

There are many things that make this book commendable. From the introduction:

Most Bible stories unfold over multiple chapters. The ten plagues of Egypt, for instance, are described in a course of five chapters of Exodus. That's too long to read to a younger child in one sitting. Other stories are told in more than one book of the Bible. Each one tells the story from a different perspective and often includes unique details. Read about the birth of Jesus only from the book of Luke and you miss the wise men; read it only from Matthew and your children won't hear about the shepherds in the fields. Combining these details into one story gives you the complete picture. It's possible to simplify Bible stories so much that you edit out important gospel connections to God's larger plan of salvation. In *The Gospel Story Bible*, we've set out to preserve this theological detail by ending each story with a short commentary, designed to connect events in the story to God's larger redemptive plan.

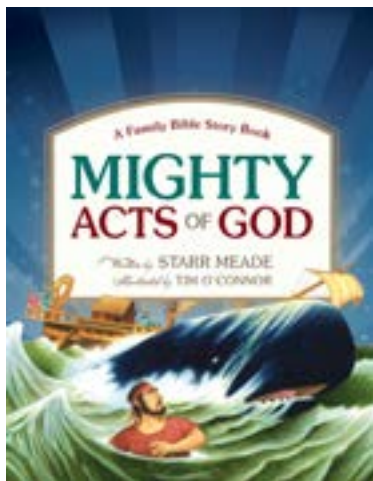
The author of these retellings has a clear, articulated purpose of teaching the gospel to children. The stories are written concisely and effectively. The final paragraph in each story articulates the significance and bigger picture of the narrative expressing its importance, significance, or relevance in the whole of the Scriptures. Each story concludes with a "Let's Talk About It!" which provides three succinct and well thought-out questions for discussion and family learning.

Illustrations of Bible stories for children should never detract or "add to" the text of scripture. A. E. Macha carefully and simply illustrates the text, without adding to it, to aid a child's imagination so that they can have a complete comprehension of the narrative being told.

MIGHTY ACTS OF GOD

A Family Bible Story Book

by Starr Meade with illustrations by
Tim O'Connor (Crossway, 2010)



This is a strong collection of ninety Bible stories. From "A Note For Parents From the Author:" Mighty Acts of God gets its name from David's statement to God in Psalm 145:4: "One generation shall commend your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts." The book is intended to be one way in which parents . . . can declare some of God's mighty acts to the next generation. . . . In this storybook, the focus in each story is on God, not on the human characters in the story. The stories are not presented primarily as moral tales giving children role models to emulate, or as accounts of how God always meets people's needs (as do genies in fairy tales!). Instead, the book's goal is for children to rightly see the God of Scripture, as he presents himself in the Bible's narrative accounts. In this way, the book as a whole provides an overview of the character and attributes of God.

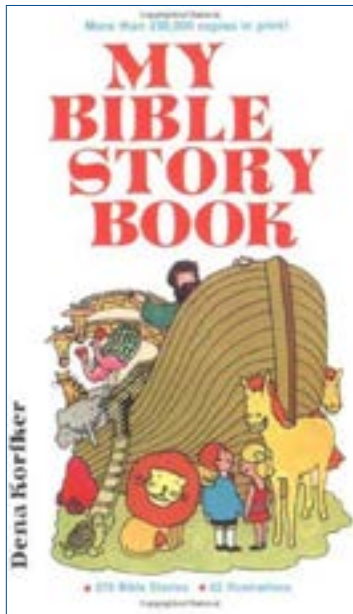
The author continues to write,

Important doctrinal teachings of historic Reformed Christianity are introduced or reinforced in these stories. Summary statements of these doctrines appear in the text in coloured type to be easily seen. Similarly, words or theological terms that might be unfamiliar to children appear in bold. . . . A short separate feature called "As for Me and My House" follows each story, providing parents with additional ideas for discussion or activities related to the truths presented in that story.

The writing of this storybook is good, while the illustrations seem like classic European colour drawings. I would say that these are generally appealing and tastefully done, while not necessarily being an accurate depiction of the time and location.

MY BIBLE STORY BOOK

by Dena Korfker and illustrated by Dirk Gringhuis and Don Ellens (Inheritance Publications, 2014; original, 1960) [summary by P. Holtvliuwer].



Dena Korfker was an American Christian writer of children's books in the second half of the twentieth century. Initially published by Kregel Publications in 1960, *My Bible Story Book* has been republished several times and is currently reprinted in paperback by Inheritance Publications of Neerlandia.

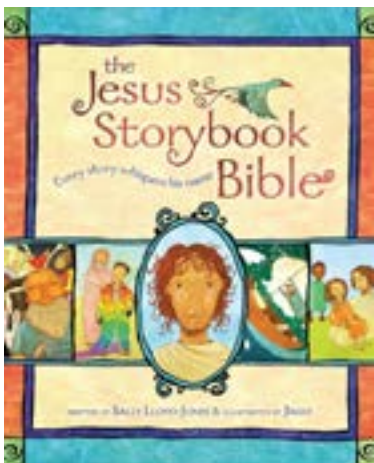
Korfker's work has four strong features that to my mind set it apart from many and made it our go-to book for meal-time devotions with our children. First, Korfker is very careful in staying faithful to the details of Scripture and telling the story accurately while doing so in a very engaging way for children (and adults!). Second, she does not shy away from the more difficult or lesser-known stories such as the rebellion of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram; the stoning of Achan; Samson and Delilah; Saul and the witch of Endor; the lie of Ananias and Sapphira; Eutychus falling from a window, and many others. The book contains 270 stories (!), 161 from the OT and 109 from the NT, making it the most complete children's story book that I am aware of. Third, every story has two or three short questions at the end for parents to ask their children—a brilliant feature! That helps little ones listen to understand and these queries become a jumping point for discussing with the older kids the deeper issues of the story and how they relate to Christ and our salvation. Fourth, each story is of similar length, not too long, and very suitable for children of all ages.

Different from some of the books mentioned above, Korfker does not as a rule offer commentary or overtly try to draw lessons or link the stories to Christ. She excels in telling the story as it is revealed in Scripture and leaves it to the parents/reader to make those other important connections. Illustrations, too, are modest and fairly sparse (basically occasional black and white sketches) and do include a few of Jesus.

THE JESUS STORYBOOK BIBLE

Every Story Whispers His Name

by Sally Lloyd-Jones with illustrations by Jago (Zonderkids, 2007)



This is a multi-million selling classic Bible-story book with more than forty stories from both the Old and New Testaments. Every story points to Jesus. Targeting a younger listener, the stories are also good for a young reader to read to an adult or even on his or her own.

The book's greatest strength is that young children clearly recognize that all Bible stories ultimately point to the Lord Jesus, who is God, as the main character. Lloyd-Jones (no relation to the famous minister Martyn Lloyd-Jones) writes creatively without taking too much creative license so that the child who has never heard this story before will be drawn in, and the child who knows the story so well and could recite the key points in the narrative will listen attentively. And then both will say, "Read me another!"

In the first story, the author outlines the key point in telling the rest of the stories. There are lots of stories in the Bible, but all the stories are telling one Big Story: the Story of how God loves his children and comes to rescue them. It takes the whole Bible to tell this Story, . . . *there is a baby*. Every Story in the Bible whispers his name . . . *and this is no ordinary baby*. This is the Child upon whom everything would depend.

Stories are brief and abundantly illustrated to keep a young child's attention and can lead to good discussion with children even if the author provides no discussion prompts.

The illustrations use a unique style and are bright and colourful. Pictures of Jesus, while somewhat modern cartoonish, clearly demonstrate a Middle Eastern man who expresses various emotions appropriate to the situation being detailed by the author. Illustrations may generate some valuable discussion within families.

A close-up, soft-focus photograph of a man and a young child. The man, with a beard and wearing a striped shirt, is leaning over the child. The child, with light brown hair and wearing a blue denim jacket, is looking down at an open book. The lighting is warm and natural, suggesting an indoor setting with a window nearby.

CONCLUSION

Bible Storybooks are a great way to introduce children to biblical truths. But they are useless if they simply collect dust near the kitchen table or a child's night table.

Have you noticed how every year in January the fliers that appear in our mailboxes showcase a plethora of exercise equipment? Marketers know that during this time of year people are finished their holiday festivities (perhaps having put on a pound or two) and are spending more time indoors. These are the folks that are being targeted for a new treadmill or rowing machine. Years ago, I was talking with a chiropractor at the beginning of a new year. I asked about an inexpensive tool for exercising and how it compares with an apparatus that one could spend thousands of dollars on. He responded saying that probably both would be equally ineffective for most people who purchase them. He expressed the thought that most equipment purchased in January will be slid under the bed, hidden in a closet, or moved to the furthest corner of the basement by March.

There is a connection between the latest exercise equipment and Bible storybooks for children. Both only have value when they are used. May the Lord fill our homes with the stories of Scripture so that we all may come to love the one gospel story they tell! 

John Scott
Bible Teacher

Guido de Brès Christian High School, Hamilton



TELL THE NEXT GENERATION

Essays on Christian Education at Home and in School

By Cornelis Van Dam (Providence Books & Press, 2024). Paperback. 254 pages. \$28.77 CDN.

Tell the next generation. The frequency of this admonition in Scripture (Deut 6:7, Josh 4:7, Ps 48:13, Ps 145:4, Eph 6:4, 2 Tim 2:2) points to its urgency. At their children's baptisms, parents vow to tell the next generation, promising to instruct them or have them instructed in the doctrine of salvation. Telling the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD (Ps 78:4) underlies the Reformed community's motivation to start, commit to, and support Christian schools. Tell the next generation is what Dr. Cornelis Van Dam does through the collection of essays assembled in his new book.

WHAT IT'S ABOUT

The contents of this book consist of previously published material that has been revised and updated for today's reader. There is something for everyone: parents, elders, pastors, teachers, and school board members. Van Dam mines Scripture to reveal what the truth of God's Word teaches about a matter. As society continues to stray further from this truth, this book serves as a helpful resource, reinforcing the importance of Christian education. Van Dam does not shy away from current issues such as gender identity and dysphoria but interacts with these matters pastorally. Extensive footnotes provide many opportunities for readers to satisfy their desire to know more.

There are four parts to this book; the first lays the foundation by considering the task of Christian education. Drawing upon Scripture, Van Dam describes teachers as fathers and students as sons, a theme undergirding his earlier publication, *Fathers and Mothers at Home and School* (2000). If that does not bring a sense of gravitas to the task of Christian education, then a consideration of the goals of education will. The first goal Van Dam describes is that education is preparation for life. Many would agree that education equips children with the knowledge, skills, and commitment needed for life (. . . though psychologist John Dewey supposedly said, "Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself"). But Van Dam would have us consider that life includes eternal life. This ties into the second goal of education, the imparting of wisdom, that is, to know God and humbly

submit to his revealed will. Here we may think of Christ's prayer in John 17:3, "And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." Indeed, telling the next generation is a weighty task, but under God's blessing it reaps an eternal reward, to the praise of his glory.

LANGUAGE & SCIENCE

With this foundation established, the next two parts of this book dig into two areas of education where the devil sows confusion: language and science. As with other good gifts from God, sin stains our use of language (e.g., euthanasia vs killing; prochoice vs abortion; gender vs sex). Van Dam contends that Christian education should expose the sinful use of language and instill a godly use of language. Memorizing Scripture and singing songs, especially psalms, are ways we can equip our children, particularly in an age when technology and images yield swift yet shallow understanding. In this regard, it would be intriguing to have Van Dam address the current uses of generative artificial intelligence (AI). The next part explores the historical tension between science and the Christian religion. Van Dam wisely reminds the reader that God cannot contradict himself in his revelation, whether through his Word or through the most beautiful book of God's creation. As Van Dam concludes, "It is an incredible gift of God that he has told us in his Word what science can never reveal" (p. 175).

The last part of this book provides a word to teachers and to students through the use of two revised graduation speeches. In addition to three appendices, Van Dam addresses the practice of family worship, the privilege and challenge of educating children with disabilities, homeschooling, and for those looking for a deeper dive, the philosophical issues behind the faith and reason discussion. *Tell the Next Generation* is a worthwhile read. 

Jack Huizenga
PhD., Lecturer at Covenant Canadian
Reformed Teachers College



THE REFORMED LORD'S SUPPER FORM

A Commentary

B. Wielenga. (Jenison: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2023). Hardcover. 426 pages. \$74.78 CDN.

Few people realize the rich history and theology behind our Lord's Supper Form. Because it's so familiar to us, it's easy to let its beautiful phraseology drift by our hearts and minds. That would be a real shame because the form can really enhance the strengthening of our faith at this sacrament. This commentary will help Reformed believers appreciate what we have in this liturgical text.

The author was a minister in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands in the early 1900s. Dr. Bastiaan Wielenga (1873–1949) served in the period between the Union of 1892 and the Liberation of 1944. He served the church in Amsterdam for more than twenty-five years.

The preface claims that this volume is the “only genuine and thorough commentary” on the form. While other Dutch authors did write on the form, and Wielenga interacts with them in the book, it certainly seems that it is unique in our literature. We can be thankful that the Reformed Free Publishing Association has published it in English.

It is indeed a line-by-line commentary on the form. That might make it sound tedious or academic, but it generally flows like a book should. However, readers should be aware that the form that Wielenga was commenting on is not exactly the form we use today in the CanRC/FRCA. Wielenga states early in the book that making the form “a little more concise would undoubtedly strengthen it” (p. 10). That's what eventually happened. So it does happen on occasion that Wielenga is commenting on a line that's been removed from our version.

There's a lot to appreciate here. Wielenga is strong on emphasizing how the sacrament is meant for weak and struggling believers. He wrote in a context where there were churches in which non-attendance at the sacrament was considered quasi-virtuous, or at least humble. Our issue today might be more with self-examination and presumption—and he addresses that too. Perhaps you've wondered why our form speaks about the body of Christ

having been “broken for the complete forgiveness of all our sins.” Wasn't Christ's body kept intact with not one of his bones being broken? Wielenga addresses this question in chapter 3 and again in chapter 5.

There are strong opinions about aspects of the Lord's Supper and Wielenga has a few of his own. You probably won't agree with all of them—I certainly didn't. For example, he argues that celebrating the Lord's Supper every Sunday “would of necessity lower the bar of the celebration of the supper.” It would become a matter of routine for everyone “so that there scarcely could be mention of a spiritual activity and spiritual blessing” (p. 341). Having once attended a URC for several months where there was weekly communion, I didn't experience that at all. If the point of the Lord's Supper is the strengthening of our faith, surely we'll benefit from *more* strengthening rather than less. Yes, we'd need to focus to avoid it becoming ritualistic, but that holds true for many other regular elements in our liturgy too.

The translator generally did good work on this volume. However, there are a few places where the editor might have graced us with an explanatory footnote. On page 143, for example, we find the German word *gestalt* and on page 307 “the known poetic term *niet-zijn*” (not known to me!).

In my congregation we now celebrate the Lord's Supper monthly. As a pastor, this gives me the opportunity to reflect more frequently on this sacrament, what it means, and how we administer it. Wielenga has given me a lot to chew on and I'm sure he'll do the same for you. 



Wes Bredenhof

Minister

Free Reformed Church of Launceston

bookreview@clarionmagazine.ca

REGIONAL SYNOD EAST

NOVEMBER 13–14, 2024

The meeting of the delegates was called to order and opened by br. Joel van Popta on behalf of the convening church, Providence Canadian Reformed Church. He led in devotions and then examined the credentials, finding them in good order. He noted the presence of three alternate delegates from Classis Niagara. Regional Synod East was declared constituted. The following brothers were appointed to serve: as chairman—Rev. P. H. Holtvliwer, as vice-chairman—Rev. R. J. den Hollander, and as clerk—Rev. R. J. Kampen.

The chairman thanked the convening church for all the work done in preparation of Regional Synod East. The agenda was adopted with one minor correction.

After an initial round of interacting with all the material on the agenda, advisory committees were struck to formulate responses. Regional Synod East then came to the following decisions:

OVERTURES

Classis Ontario West submitted an overture regarding adding a clarifying footnote to the article of the Apostles' Creed "he descended into hell." Regional Synod East decided to forward it on to General Synod 2025 with only a few very minor changes.

Classis Central Ontario submitted an overture regarding Church Order Article 55 to include the possibility of using consistory-approved songs in addition to the Psalms and Hymns adopted by General Synod 2025. Regional Synod East decided to forward the overture to General Synod together with some additional recommendations.

Classis Central Ontario submitted an overture with three proposals for shortening the duration of general synods. Regional Synod East will forward to General Synod 2025 proposals 2 and 3 of their overture, namely that a hybrid of virtual (for administrative matters) and in-person meetings be considered and that a clerical team be provided to the executive of general synods.

Classis Central Ontario and Classis Northern Ontario submitted very similar overtures regarding a change to Church Order Article 49, to change delegation to General Synod 2025 from regional synod to classis. Regional Synod East decided to forward the overture to General Synod 2025 with one modification.

Classis Central Ontario submitted an overture regarding the hymn cap. Regional Synod East declared the overture inadmissible since no new grounds were provided.

APPEALS

Two appeals against decisions of Classis Northern Ontario June 2023 and 2024 were dealt with in closed session, both of them denied. Two more appeals were dealt with in open session against decisions of Classis Northern Ontario June and September 2024, both of which were also denied.

REPORTS

Regional Synod East received with thankfulness the treasury report and its audit. The proposed assessment of \$4.00 per communicant member is adopted. Each church should send this assessment to its classis treasurer (who will then forward this to

the treasury church of Regional Synod East.) Regional Synod East received the reports from deputies that gave concurring advice on the retirements of Revs. P. Aasman and D. Wynia. Also received with thankfulness were reports of the successful peremptory examinations of candidates Mark Vanderlinde and Zach Vanderploeg. Regional Synod East discharged the deputies appointed by the previous Regional Synod East.

APPOINTMENTS

Regional Synod East will provide suggested names of one governor and two alternates to General Synod Aldergrove 2025 as requested by the Board of Governors of CRTS.

Synod made the following regular appointments:

The Treasury church for Regional Synod East:

- Grassie—Covenant

The church for the inspection of the books of the treasury:

- Lincoln—Vineyard

The church to maintain the archives:

- Toronto—Bethel

The church to inspect the archives:

- Brampton—Grace

The church to convene the next Regional Synod on Nov. 19, 2025:

- Attercliffe

Synod appointed the following Deputies ad Article 48 CO for the upcoming year:

From Classis Central Ontario for Classis Northern Ontario and Classis Niagara

- Rev. Clarence Vandervelde
- First alternate: Rev. Anthony Roukema
- Second alternate: Rev. Ian Wildeboer

From Classis Northern Ontario for Classis Central Ontario and Classis Western Ontario

- Rev. Marc Jagt
- First alternate: Rev. Jeff Poort
- Second alternate: Rev. Tyler Vandergaag

From Classis Niagara for Classis Central Ontario and Classis Ontario West

- Rev. Rodney Vermeulen
- First alternate: Rev. Rolf den Hollander
- Second alternate: Rev. John Louwerse

From Classis Ontario West for Classis Northern Ontario and Classis Niagara

- Rev. John Van Woudenberg
- First alternate: Rev. Ken Kok
- Second alternate: Rev. Steve Van Leeuwen

Synod appointed the following delegates to General Synod Aldergrove 2025:

Elder Delegates:

- Don Aasman
- Gerald Boot
- Ron Bremer
- John Harsevoort
- John Jager
- Andy Jairam
- First alternate: Cornell Feenstra
- Second alternate: Peter Ostermeier
- Third alternate: Menco Wieske
- Fourth alternate: Gerard Woudenberg
- Fifth alternate: Butch Medemblik
- Sixth alternate: Tim Hutten

Minister Delegates

- Rolf den Hollander
- Peter Holtvliwer
- Hilmer Jagersma
- Marc Jagt
- John Louwerse
- Jake Torenvliet
- First alternate: John Van Woudenberg
- Second alternate: Ian Wildeboer
- Third alternate: Tyler Vandergaag
- Fourth alternate: Gerrit Brintjes
- Fifth alternate: John Ludwig
- Sixth alternate: Steve VandeVelde

Regional Synod East set the remuneration for loss of wages for delegates to general synod as per the recommendation of Aldergrove, the convening church, at \$300 per day, with a maximum of \$1500 per week. Mileage compensation to General Synod was set at the CRA recommended 70 cents/kilometre, with maximum reimbursement not to exceed the cost of air-travel.

The chairman ruled with deep gratitude that, especially considering the volume of material and its sensitivity, brotherly censure was not necessary.

After the meeting approved a method for finalizing the Acts, finalized a press release, and engaged in devotions, the chairman declared Regional Synod East closed. 

Rev. R.J. den Hollander
(vice-chairman at that time)

REGIONAL SYNOD WEST

NOVEMBER 19-20, 2024

The meeting of the delegates was called to order and opened by Rev. Mark ten Haaf on behalf of the convening church (Providence Canadian Reformed Church, Edmonton). He thanked the hosting church of Abbotsford and then led in devotions. After devotions, Rev. Mark ten Haaf and Rev. Rob Schouten examined the credentials and found them to be in good order. Regional Synod West was declared constituted. The assembly appointed the following delegates to serve on the executive: as chairman—Rev. Rob Schouten, as vice-chairman—Rev. Douglas Vandeburgt, and as clerk—br. Lyndon Kok.

The chairman thanked the convening church for all the work done in preparation of Regional Synod West. The agenda was adopted after the addition of a series of letters from a church addressing the overtures on the agenda. The chairman welcomed Rev. Aaron van der Heiden who brought fraternal greetings from Classis Western Canada of the United Reformed Churches. The chairman offered a prayer for the United Reformed Churches.

After an initial round of interacting with all the material on the agenda, advisory committees were struck to formulate responses. Regional Synod West then came to the following decisions:

CORRESPONDENCE

Providence Canadian Reformed Church proposed amending the regulations of Regional Synod West around the timing of when the convening church requests the churches and classes to submit matters for the agenda and by when the churches and classes should submit said matters. Regional Synod West returned the matter to Providence church with some observations as well as a

request to rewrite the proposal that offers greater clarity on what they are seeking to accomplish with these changes.

OVERTURES

Classis Pacific East submitted an overture regarding Church Order Article 55 to include the possibility of using consistory-approved songs in addition to the psalms and hymns adopted by general synod. Because Article 55 is a matter of the churches in common, Regional Synod West decided to forward the overture to General Synod 2025 along with its observations and considerations.

Classis Pacific West submitted an overture regarding Church Order Article 55 to include the possibility of using consistory-approved hymns in addition to the psalms adopted by general synod. Because Article 55 is a matter of the churches in common, Regional Synod West decided to forward the overture to General Synod 2025 along with its observations and considerations.

Classis Pacific East submitted an overture proposing a revision to the form for infant baptism. Regional Synod West decided to forward the overture together with a recommendation for General Synod 2025 to appoint a committee for the purpose of proposing to the churches a revised form for infant baptism.

Classis Pacific East submitted an overture proposing a revision to the marriage form. Regional Synod West decided not to adopt the overture.

Classis Pacific East submitted an overture to add a section to the regulations of Regional Synod West pertaining to appeals. Regional Synod West decided not to adopt the overture.

Classis Pacific West submitted an overture regarding a revision to Church Order Article 30 to allow individual churches to directly overture General Synod on matters belonging to the churches in common. Regional Synod West decided to adopt the overture and forward it to General Synod 2025.

Classis Pacific West submitted an overture regarding Church Order Article 49, to change delegation to general synod from something done by regional synod to something done by the classes. Regional Synod West decided not to adopt the overture.

APPEALS

An appeal against Classis Pacific West, Spring 2021 was dealt with in open session. Regional Synod West sustained the appeal.

REPORTS

Regional Synod West received with thankfulness the treasurer's report and its audit. RSW received a report that the archives were in good order. RSW received the reports from deputies that gave concurring advice on the successful peremptory examinations of candidates Taylor Bredenhof, Faustin Emadjeu, and Dathan Pleiter.

APPOINTMENTS

Regional Synod made the following regular appointments:

- The treasurer—br. John Moedt
- The church for the inspection of the books of the treasurer—Coaldale
- The church to maintain the archives—Edmonton-Providence
- The church to inspect the archives—Edmonton-Immanuel
- The church to convene the next Regional Synod on Nov. 18, 2025—Willoughby-Heights

Synod appointed the following ministers as Deputies ad Article 48 CO for the upcoming year:

From Classis Pacific West for Classis Pacific East and Classis Manitoba:

- Douglas Vandeburgt
- First alternate: Karlo Janssen
- Second alternate: Hendrik Alkema

From Classis Pacific East for Classis Pacific West and Classis Alberta:

- Bill Wielenga
- First alternate: Rob Schouten
- Second alternate: Dave deBoer

From Classis Alberta for Classis Pacific East and Classis Manitoba:

- Rev. Julius Van Spronsen
- First alternate: Rev. Mark ten Haaf
- Second alternate: Rev. Gerard Veurink

From Classis Manitoba for Classis Pacific West and Classis Alberta:

- Rev. Joe Poppe
- First alternate: Rev. James Slaa
- Second alternate: Rev. Carl VanDam

Synod appointed the following delegates to General Synod Aldergrove 2025:

Elder Delegates

- Ron deHaan
- Kent Dykstra
- Lyndon Kok
- James Teitsma
- Bill vanBeek
- Adam van den Hoven
- First alternate: Ken Hoeksema
- Second alternate: Richard Buist
- Third alternate: Gerald Ostermeier
- Fourth alternate: Aubrey Vandergaag

Minister Delegates

- Hendrik Alkema
- Karlo Janssen
- Joe Poppe
- Rob Schouten
- Carl VanDam
- Ken Wieske
- First alternate: James Slaa
- Second alternate: Gerard Veurink
- Third alternate: Douglas Vandeburgt
- Fourth alternate: Dave DeBoer

Regional Synod West will provide suggested names of two governors and two alternates to General Synod 2025 as requested by the Board of Governors of CRTS.

RSW set the remuneration for loss of wages for delegates to general synod as per the recommendation of Aldergrove, the convening church, at \$300 per day. Mileage compensation to general synod was set at the CRA recommended 70 cents/kilometre, with maximum reimbursement not to exceed the cost of air-travel.

The chairman ruled with deep gratitude that brotherly censure was not necessary.

After the assembly finalized the press release and approved a method for finalizing the Acts, the chairman led in devotions and then declared Regional Synod West closed. 🇨🇦

Rev. D. Vandeburgt
(vice-chairman at that time)

letter to the EDITOR

Dear Editor,

Bavinck's "Biblical and Religious Psychology" raised some concerns for Rev. Wes Bredenhof (Vol. 73, No. 16, "Psychology from the Bible") that got me thinking about another book from the theologian called "Essays on Religion, Science and Society" (John Bolt, ed., Baker Academic, 2008). Bavinck has a quirky little chapter in this book that speaks to the topic. To recap, Rev. Bredenhof took issue with Bavinck's view on general revelation—that it encompasses nature, culture, and history. The culture bit seemed off-putting to me as well, but then Rev. Bredenhof makes a curious move: he calls science part of the culture and does not accept it as a route to general revelation. He wants to avoid any mischief that might arise from such an allowance. The "Essays" book (chapter 5) doesn't add much insight on culture as a source of revelation, but it does a good job highlighting that science is very different from philosophies like materialism, which some people build around the discoveries from science. Bavinck is an "eyes wide open" guy on the dangers of such philosophies, yet he retains a very favourable view of science. Why? Because our Belgic Confession does! Article 2 calls creation a most beautiful book wherein all creatures, great and small, are as so many letters leading us to perceive clearly God's attributes. Science is how we read this beautiful book, in depth and with understanding. Science is the most powerful method we have for accessing general revelation. It's an organized, principled approach to investigation and it's essential. Look at it this way: science relates to creation like systematic theology relates to the Bible. Creation has this built-in, beautiful coherence that allows science to function. And the Bible also has a beautiful coherence that makes systematic theology possible. I suppose we could ignore both organized and principled approaches to inquiry, but we'd not be faithful students of God's revelation—general or special.

David Schriemer
Calgary

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Flamborough, ON: **Rich & Cynthia VanderLaan**

Nathan & Hannah (Ryker, Taliah, Kailey, Bennett), Kendra, Tash & Josh Schenkel, Debra, Calvin (Ava D'Addazio), Ashley (Derek Vanderveen), Brittany (Zach Ludwig)

Hamilton, ON: **Mike & Karen VanderLaan**

Matthew (Skylar Smit), Shawn (Sarah Dykeman), Joel (Stephanie Vanderboom)

Guelph, ON: **Joanna & Lloyd VanLuik**

Rachelle, Hein & Juanita, Laurissa (Josh Neven), Courtney

Mount Hope, ON: **Adrian & Wilma VanderLaan**

Corey, Jordan, Nicholas, Brendan, Mikayla

Jordan, ON: **Janet & Jason VanHuizen**

Dylan, Lauryn, Emma, Katrina, Levi, Hailey

Wellington Christian Home – 261 Stone Church Rd.
East (Apt. 249) Hamilton, ON. L9B 2X3

The Board of the Canadian Reformed School Society of Calgary invites applications for:

Elementary or High School Teacher
for the 2025/26 school year



Tyndale Christian School offers Kindergarten through Grade 12 with an enrollment of approximately 100 students.

We also invite early applications or inquiries from current BEd students in the final years of their studies for future openings at all grade levels or subject areas.

If you would like more information, would be interested in touring the school, or would like to submit an application, please contact one of the following:

Mr. Nathan Kok,
Principal
nkok@tyndalecalgary.ca

Mr. Tyler Vanderwoude,
Board Secretary
secretary@tyndalecalgary.ca



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invites applications for full-time openings at the
ELEMENTARY & HIGH SCHOOL LEVEL
for the 2025-2026 school year.

Both B. Ed and CCRTC graduates are encouraged to apply.

DCS is a K-12 Reformed school with over 285 students in the beautiful prairie town of Carman MB, a short 45-minute drive SW of Winnipeg. It offers a highly supportive community, attractive facilities, competitive wages and a friendly atmosphere. DCS serves three local congregations in the communities of Carman and Elm Creek with their combined 1000 members.

Applicants must be communicant members of a Canadian Reformed Church or a Church in ecclesiastical fellowship with the same.

Applications should be sent to Dufferin Christian School
boardsecretary@dufferinchristian.ca

For more information, please contact:

Principal: Dr. Chris deBoer at 204-745-2278 principal@dufferinchristian.ca
Chairman: Mr. Jon Dewit chairman@dufferinchristian.ca

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HIRING A PRINCIPAL Blessed with a team of experienced and capable teaching and administrative staff, we have an opportunity for a devoted, confessionally Reformed Christian leader with a **start date of July, 2025**. Our Principal works alongside the Board of Directors to provide strategic direction and leadership, supports our biblical worldview, and has a strong desire to see our students thrive, both academically, and as discerning and passionate citizens of Christ's kingdom.

Does this sound like you?

For a full description of our Principal Roles and Responsibilities and/or to apply for the position, we invite you to submit the following documents to the email address below:

- Resume and Cover Letter
- Statement of Philosophy of Christian education
- Statement of Faith.

Upon selection, we will require:

- A Pastoral Reference Letter from your church
- Three References (2 professional, 1 personal)
- Vulnerable Sector Screening

Educational & Experience Requirements

- B.A. / B.Ed. – required
- Has held a Vice Principal or Principal role at another school
- Has more than 3 years teaching experience
- Previously worked in a Christian School where the candidate has demonstrated spiritual leadership

Applications and inquiries can be sent to the Principal Search Committee
at info@beaconhillca.org. Thank you for your consideration!



Attercliffe Canadian Reformed Elementary School

invites applications for the following positions for the 2025-2026 school year:

FULL OR PART TIME JUNIOR TEACHERS

FULL OR PART TIME PRIMARY TEACHERS

FULL / PART TIME EDUCATIONAL OR TEACHERS ASSISTANT

ACRES is on a 100-acre property in a beautiful rural area in Niagara/Haldimand. We serve several Reformed churches in the area, and are blessed with a close-knit staff, a supportive community and a student population of over 200. Please send all applications, questions, or comments to the principal, Mr. Clarence Blokhuis, principal@acreschool.ca

- Applicants should be members of the Canadian Reformed Churches or of a sister church.
- Applications for teachers should include a resume, statement of faith, philosophy of education and two letters of reference.
- Applicants for Educational Assistants should include a resume, statement of faith, and two letters of reference.

Promises Unbroken

Exploring God's Covenant of Love from Birth to Eternity

By Willem B. Slomp



In Promises Unbroken, Willem B. Slomp explores the many ways that we can hear God's love for us and listen to his gentle yet powerful voice. This contemplative volume begins with a meditation on God as creator and guide, explores such topics as our search for the comfort of home, the inclusion of children in the covenant, membership in God's church and comfort amid grief and suffering. The volume concludes with reflections on prayer. Here is a story for those who long for the brokenness of this world to be mended, and for those who look forward to God's promised eternity.

Published by Purple Breeze Press, *Promises Unbroken: Exploring God's Covenant of Love from Birth to Eternity* is available on Amazon and Barnes and Noble websites.

Coaldale Christian School

COS is a growing K-12 Reformed School with over 200 students in beautiful Southern Alberta, offering students from living in an amiable community of believers. We are 15 minutes away from the historic city of Lethbridge (pop. 105,000), and 2.5 hours from the heart of the Rocky Mountains. \$400,000 gets you into an established neighbourhood, with new subdivisions to select from. 330+ days of full sunshine comes free.

coaldalechristianschool.com



Exciting Opportunities!

Join Our Team for the 2025-2026 School Year!

Coaldale Christian School is looking for passionate educators for various K-12 positions. We offer competitive salaries, professional development, and a supportive community. If you're eager to make a difference in a vibrant Christian environment, apply today!

Applicants must be members of a Canadian Reformed Church or one with whom we have ecclesiastical fellowship.

Inquiries may be directed to

Principal, Jeff Van Raalte
(403) 345-4055 | jeff.vanraalte@coaldalecs.com

Applications may be sent to

Chair of Personnel Committee, Pete Harthorn
peter.harthorn@mcg.ca



HIRING: TEACHERS AND EA/ECE

Timothy Christian School, located in Hamilton, Ontario, is **looking for qualified and enthusiastic teachers and an EA/ECE** to fill vacancies for the 2025-2026 school year. While we have staff openings in the intermediate grades, anyone interested in teaching in any grade, full-time or part-time, is encouraged to apply. We may have some flexibility in grade assignments. The EA/ECE opening is in the kindergarten/primary grades.

Timothy Christian School aims to place covenant children in an excellent learning environment that allows them to deepen their understanding of all that God has created. We do this with Reformed teachers who have a passion for leading their students through formative learning experiences.

Teachers are expected to help our students grow in the knowledge of the LORD, in perseverance, in discernment, in compassion, and in competency.

If you would like to be part of the teaching team at Timothy Christian School, please provide your application, including a resume, a statement of faith, your view of Reformed education and two letters of references, to the HR Committee:

SEND IT TO:

The Human Resource Committee
c/o Timothy Christian School
430 East 25th St.
Hamilton ON L8V 3B4

OR EMAIL IT TO:

hrc@timothyschool.org

For more information, please contact the Principal, Michael Noot

Phone School: 905-385-3953
Email: mnoot@timothyschool.org

Timothy School will accommodate the needs of people with disabilities in our hiring process.

Emma Kuizenga
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Primary + Secondary Teachers for 2025 and beyond

Due to growing student numbers and the pursuit of ideal staffing levels, we'd love to discuss our current and future needs with suitably qualified and adventurous teachers or education students.

Our teachers must:

- be a member of the Free Reformed Church of Australia or any of her sister churches.
- overflow with joy at being a child of God and working with covenant children.
- be enthusiastic to share the gospel in word and deed.
- want to work in a collaborative environment that values unique skills and ideas.
- be able to use high impact strategies and cutting-edge resources and technology to enhance teaching and learning.
- be able to be registered to teach in Tasmania and work with vulnerable people.

Competitive salary and benefits recognising your qualifications and dedication are based on the Educational Services (Teachers) Award 2020.

INTERESTED?

- Contact the Principal, Mr D Coote, to explore opportunities - cooted@jcs.tas.edu.au
- Find application forms at www.jcs.tas.edu.au/employment
- Send completed applications to Mrs K Wielstra - Assoc Sec wielstrak@jcs.tas.edu.au

Expressions of Interest or Applications welcome any time

Free Reformed School Association TAS t/a
John Calvin School, Launceston
49-53 Howick St
South Launceston TAS 7249



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SCHOOL YEAR**

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For more information, or to apply with a resume, and a statement of Reformed faith, please contact:

Board Chair
Kent VanVliet
choiretca.school /250-241-1111

Vice Principal
Lorene Raap
rloope@gmail.com
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The Credo Christian Elementary & Middle School Board invites applications to fill **teaching** positions beginning in **September 2025**.

Our K-8 school, located in the beautiful Fraser Valley serves approximately 260 students in a welcoming, Christ-centered community. Staff members value the positive, collaborative teaching culture and appreciate the strong support from parents and the broader school community.

We're looking for teachers who are:

- Committed to teaching in a Canadian Reformed context
- Active communicant members of a Canadian Reformed, United Reformed, or other sister church
- Certified to teach in BC or eligible to obtain BC certification

Inquiries and applications can be directed to:

Otto Bouwman, Principal
604-530-1131 (school)
1-360-530-1524 (cell)
o.bouwman@credoces.org





Hamilton, Ontario

Our Board is seeking qualified educators to join our faculty for the 2025- 2026 academic year. We welcome applications from all subject areas, with a particular interest in candidates with expertise in music education.

We are looking for individuals who possess a genuine love for the Lord, a passion to foster a love for learning in young people, and a commitment to serving our community as we assist parents with the education of their children.

If you believe you align with these qualities, we encourage you to explore potential teaching opportunities with us. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any inquiries.

Applicants must be members of the Canadian Reformed or United Reformed Churches. All positions would commence **August 1, 2025**.

For further information, please contact the principal, Mr. J. Heemskerk at school.

Telephone: 905 574 4011
E-mail: principal@guidodebres.com

Letters of application should include university and teaching qualifications, two letters of reference, a statement about your view of Christian education, and a recommendation from your church council or consistory.

Please email application and relevant documents to: principal@guidodebres.com



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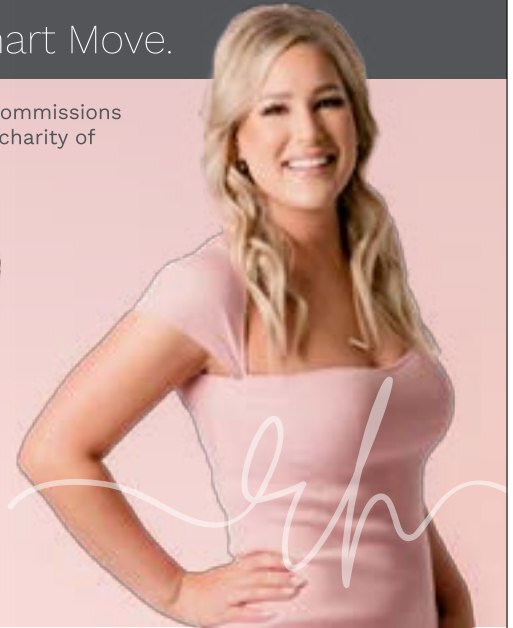
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